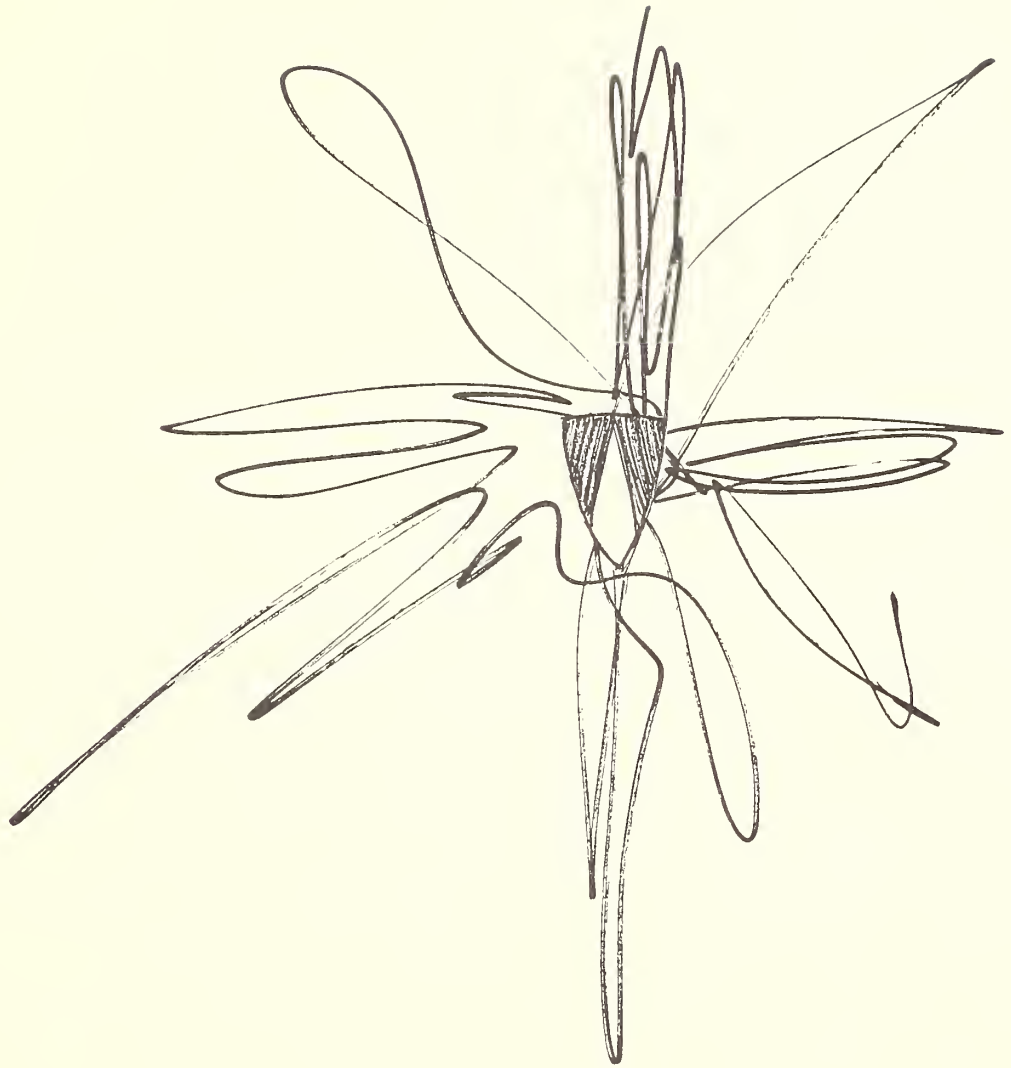



Volume 15  
1996



# Dominican Monastic Research



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# DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH



**Volume 15**

**1996**



## DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH

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1996

DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH is published by the Conference of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers of the United States of America. The Conference is an organization of independent monasteries whose purpose is to foster the monastic contemplative life of the nuns in the spirit of Saint Dominic.

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DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH is a spiritual and theological review written by the nuns. Its purpose is to foster the Dominican monastic contemplative life by the sharing of insights gained from study and prayer. It is published once a year as a service to the nuns. It is also available to the wider Dominican Family and others upon request. A donation of \$8.00 to aid in the cost of printing would be appreciated, when possible.

Dominican Monastic Search welcomes all its readers to contribute articles for publication. We ask that manuscripts be prepared with concern for literary and intellectual quality. Appropriate subjects for DMS include scripture, theology, philosophy, spirituality, Dominican life, and the liberal arts insofar as they contribute to our Dominican vocation. Serious poetry reflective of these categories may also be submitted, though only a small amount can be used. A theme for each issue of DMS is usually announced in advance, but is not intended to limit the scope of articles. Before submitting a manuscript, please refer to the page of guidelines at the end of the most recent issue of Dominican Monastic Search.


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Discerning What  
is good:  


Dominican  
Contemplative Life in  
Conversation with  
Contemporary Culture?







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## FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of Dominican Monastic Search traditionally presents all of the talks given at the 1996 General Assembly. This year for the first time, each topic was addressed twice: by one of the nuns and by a visiting speaker, thus exploring each subject from wider dimensions and complementary points of view. Some of the presentations have been refined for publication by their authors, and so may not appear verbatim as they are heard on the audio tapes. Due to the large number of papers, no additional articles could be included in this issue.

The Assembly topic DISCERNING THE GOOD: Dominican Contemplative Life in Conversation with Contemporary Culture encapsulates one of the most urgent tasks of our historical moment. We can dialog well only if our listening and speaking arise from hearts attuned to the Gospel. By using "the bridge that is Christ," we will cross over into the new millennium with clearer insights and goals for the renewal and flourishing of Dominic's vision for our role in his order of evangelical preachers. Each one of us has been chosen by the Lord to live Dominican life precisely in these times, to have a part in the conversation and the discernment. We accomplish it, not so much in occasional historic gatherings or notable public deeds, important as these can be, but rather in our daily small personal choices to here and now live our consecration to the full. Each of the Assembly papers has much counsel and encouragement to offer us for these moments of grace.

Your new board of editors extends their gratitude to our outgoing president and editors for their four years of excellent work. We aspire to follow their example of dedication and to help DMS continue to thrive.

Do you notice a "new look" about this issue? Acting on some helpful suggestions, we are trying for a more unified style throughout the journal. In response to the request of the General Assembly, we offer a reformulation of guidelines regarding the content of papers. Our goal is to make DMS as attractive and readable as possible, and to facilitate the contribution and editing of articles. The process is still fluid, and we welcome your comments.

Sister Dominic, O.P.  
Elmira



# Theology



may, 1996

All the crisis issues of our times ... have a common denominator: a struggle for the truth and dignity of the human person.

sister mary jeremiah

If the Incarnation is true then what that means is divinity and humanity operate in direct proportion. In other words, the closer to God one is, the more fully human that person is.

sister catherine hulbert





# UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Sister Mary Jeremiah, OP  
Lufkin, Texas

## Introduction

I feel very happy and grateful to be here with you. Preparing for this Assembly and my talk has been a very enriching and exciting experience.

And I really believe that the theology of the human person is extremely important. Last month I received a magazine in the Print Shop where I work that had five ads in which people were depicted as mechanical heads. The person frequently seems to be brought to the level of a machine and clearinghouse for information.

But another image of the person came to mind from our sister, St. Catherine of Siena. She records in the first chapter of the Dialogue these words of our Lord (Word):

*Open your mind's eye and look within me,  
and you will see the dignity and beauty of my reasoning creature.  
But beyond the beauty I have given the soul  
by creating her in my image and likeness,  
consider those who are clothed in the wedding garment of charity,  
adorned with many true virtues:  
They are united with me through love.  
So I say, if you should ask me who they are,  
I would answer, that they are another myself;  
because they have lost and drowned their own will  
and have clothed themselves and united themselves  
and conformed themselves with my [will].  
(D 1)*

This morning I want to share with you some of the reasons I think this topic of the human person is so crucial for Cloistered Dominican Nuns

- + It affects our ministry of adoration of God and mediation (intercession) for our neighbor.

- + It touches every aspect of the lives of human persons. Each of the following presentations will, in some way, be a discussion of the human person. (economy, philosophy, psychology, enclosure...)

- + The women entering our communities come from our contemporary culture and are deeply affected by it, even if they themselves never embraced it.

- + And the many changes we have made in our monastic life-style reflect a deepening positive understanding of the human person; but we can also be



influenced by the negatives elements of our contemporary culture. We need to be discerning.

I believe our understanding of the human person may be THE most important topic of our times.

At the dawn of Christianity, the Church struggled with questions about the Personhood of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, as well as the Personhood of God.<sup>1</sup> Today, as we approach the the Third Millennium of Christianity, we are still pondering the reality of personhood. But as is so characteristic of recent centuries, our eyes are focused upon ourselves—our personhood. What does it mean to be a human person? And especially, what does this mean for Dominican nuns on the threshold of the 21st century?

Pope John Paul II has written:

Undoubtedly our age is the age that has written and spoken the most about the human being... But paradoxically it is also the age of people's deepest anxieties about their identity and destiny; it is the age when human beings have been debased to previously unsuspected levels, when human values have been trodden underfoot as never before.<sup>2</sup>

So, a solid understanding of the human person is crucial, because it radically influences all the crises of the times: abortion, contraception, euthanasia, gender issues, materialism, terrorism, war. All these issues have a common denominator: a struggle for the truth and dignity of the human person.

## Culture

How does society present the human person? What are some of the characteristics of our culture - positive and negative? How are we to help redeem and transform them in Christ?

First, some **Negative** aspects of our culture:

- person is machine with body parts and tool to get things done
- pervasive mindlessness due to too much TV, violence, the information glut
- toys as grotesque objects
- radical feminism sometimes seems to reveal a hatred of self & others as God designed

Culture says - we are all equal person who just happen to be in a male or female body. Gender has nothing to do with one as a person. The body is incidental to one's identity. Sexuality is not subject to absolute norms. It's a matter of "your choice."

As we know this is the opposite of the teaching of our Catholic faith.

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<sup>1</sup>(Christology - 2 natures in one Person; and the Trinitarian theology - One Essence, 3 Persons.

<sup>2</sup>John Paul II, "Opening Address at the Puebla Conference," I, I, 9, in Puebla and Beyond, ed. John Eagleson & Philip Scharper (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 63.



- Society's emphasis upon the environment sometimes tends towards a kind of pantheism. This is not to say there is not a valid need to care for the earth and be stewards of creation.
  - animals are portrayed with spiritual qualities
  - birds, whales are more important than humans
- Our culture also focuses on instant self-gratification and indulging the body and physical desires.
- Adam & Eve wanted the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is still a great temptation for humans as seen in the indiscriminate craving for information. We, too, can be pulled into it.

BUT -- Monasticism can offer a delicate balance:

- know what is going on and keep in touch with progress
- yet discern what fits in with the sublime ideals and goals of our vocation, and drop the rest

What are the **Positive** aspects of our culture?

- a new emphasis on relationships and treating others with respect
- building community, solidarity, better communication for unity
- the many peace and justice issues, speaking for the voiceless and marginalized: the "little ones"
- we are beginning to see hints of a return to simplicity of life-style and a renewed appreciation for the traditional family unit
- there has been a positive response to radical feminism which presents authentic and important feminine values
- and there is a renewed interest in and hunger for spirituality

### Pope John Paul II

I would like to indicate some of the areas of discussion in contemporary theology of the human person by highlighting them in the teaching of Pope John Paul II because most of his philosophical and theological writings have been concerned with the human person.

Christ has entrusted His Church as the guardian of the mystery and truth about the human person. This truth is God's truth and we cannot change it.

And the Truth of the human person is that the person is created in the "**image and likeness of God**" (which means we have the desire and capacity to know and be known / love and be loved and expressing ourselves in **freedom**). Through the Incarnation and Redemption by Christ, humanity has been raised to a "dignity beyond compare."<sup>3</sup> Humanity can only understand itself in Christ, because Christ is the only perfect and complete human being, the archetype of all human beings. He has uniquely penetrated and embraced the fullness of human life and its mystery.

The human being is "the only **creature** that **exists for its own sake**."<sup>4</sup> and should never be used or regarded as a thing (even God respects our freedom). We are

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<sup>3</sup>John Paul II, Redemptor Hominis #8, cf. GS #22.

<sup>4</sup>Cf., GS #24.

not self-sufficient; but dependent upon God who determines human destiny, as well as the norms of life and morality.

Humans reflect the trinitarian life of God by being made for communion with other persons.... in a family of **relationships**. A person "...cannot find self except through a **sincere gift of self...**"<sup>5</sup> in relationship.

John Paul's teaching on **sexuality** is made for our times. Young people are hit from all sides with counterfeit ideas on personhood, love and sexuality. They hunger for the truth. Our monastic lives, our vocation, witness to the fact that a Christian life of "dynamic orthodoxy" may be hard and sacrificial, but it is also the truth, and hence, gives a profound sense of security, well-being hope and joy.

John Paul II has done an invaluable service for the dignity of **women** in his call for a "new feminism."<sup>6</sup> He emphasizes the equality of men and women; but also their complementarity. Woman has "a certain primacy in the order of love." She is the first to receive love and the first to give love. Woman by her nature has a capacity to be an expert, prophet, of love... LOVE is the very essence of God & the purpose of all human existence.

Women are called by God to be a "support and source of spiritual strength for other people." (Mulieris Dignitatem #30)

The pope believes that the unique contribution of women is essential for the future of civilization.<sup>7</sup> He wrote in his Letter to Women last year, "In giving themselves to others each day, women fulfill their deepest vocation. Perhaps more than men, women acknowledge the person, because they see persons with their hearts."<sup>8</sup>

Women, cooperating with the grace of Christ, intuitively know the path for restoring the image and likeness in humans; of enabling others to feel they are loved and belong; that someone cares, listens and understands them. The deepest realities for which people are hungering correspond to the gifts and "genius" of women.<sup>9</sup>

Human beings are not meant to be the victims of structures, but have personal responsibility for their actions through the gift of **freedom**. The pope frequently describes the condition of the human heart as wounded by **sin**. God's original plan was not for [people] to be enemies [but brothers and sisters], not in a dialectic of confrontation, but of love.<sup>10</sup>

In the pope's teaching, **love**, not struggle, has the final word.

Because every person is redeemed by Christ; every person and every aspect of human life is entrusted to the care of the Church. Since we nuns have a special duty of intercession, every person, then, is the object of our concern and prayer.

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<sup>5</sup>John Paul II, Redemptor Hominis, #13, GS #24.

<sup>6</sup>John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, #99, 1995.

<sup>7</sup>John Paul II, Angelus Message of June 18, 1995.

<sup>8</sup>John Paul II, Letter to Women, July 10, 1995.

<sup>9</sup>John Paul II, Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>John Paul II, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, #2.

## CONCLUSION

Our vocation as Dominican nuns on the threshold of the Third Millennium involves being experts in what it means to be a human person; what it means to be a Christian, a woman, a consecrated woman.

The Holy Father's recent apostolic exhortation, Vita Consecrata, challenges religious to become icons of holiness - conformed to Christ crucified.

We and every human being are invited to "divinization." Our monasteries are pulsating with this divine life. I would like to leave you with two images representing our contemporary culture and our monastic life.

The SUPER INFORMATION HIGHWAY is an image of our culture. Many people are taken up with the daily proliferation of new products and projects. If you want to get "anywhere," you must be "on-line."

This image of the super highway conveys:

- outward expansion and movement
- people going in all directions; rushing everywhere and going nowhere parallel, crossing, loops
- isolated in one's own vehicle, passing one another; moving farther apart
- never touching or stopping
- go, go; more, more; faster, faster

But there is another image >>

### A MAGNET

A Monastery is like a magnet:

- solid and stable.
- It has an invisible drawing power.
- There's a certain mystery about a magnet.

A magnetic field is caused by the intense activity, or motion, of electrons orbiting within an enclosed area radiating energy - electricity. The magnetic field, or gravity, holds the universe together.

-There is a tremendous dynamic energy and power within our monasteries because of the intensity of the inward focus attracting others to itself and to God its source of magneticism.

Our Constitutions calls us to be vibrant women of the Church, radiating the energy of love, holiness, strength, touching other people's lives and drawing them to God.

As we deepen our understanding of the human person through the various presentations, and as we reflect together upon these issues, may the Spirit show us ways to strengthen our magnetism to radiate to the ends of the universe the divine presence and at the same time, draw all creation to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

»»

# UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Sr. Mary Catherine Hilkert, O.P.  
Akron, Ohio

<sup>1</sup>Given this vast topic of *The Contemporary Theology of the Human Person* and your specific focus on how that relates to a vibrant living of contemplative Dominican life today, I chose to select three different theological perspectives; all of which, I think, provide wisdom for Dominicans who are trying to live contemplative lives in the contemporary world. I am going to speak about Karl Rahner first of all. Anyone who wishes to speak of Catholic theology in the twentieth century stands on the shoulders of the giant, Karl Rahner. He is probably *the* major Catholic theologian of the 20th century. You may remember that quite a while ago now there was even in The New York Times Sunday Magazine an article about him shortly before he died that was called "*The Quiet Mover of the Catholic Church*."<sup>2</sup> I think we are all deeply indebted to him, for without sacrificing the Catholic tradition (and we as Dominicans are particularly appreciative that he did not sacrifice the Thomistic tradition) he was given in a singular way the deep grace to truly move us into contact with the *modern* world. Rahner will be the main focus of this presentation.

Then I would like to speak more briefly about the contribution of our brother Edward Schillebeeckx, the Flemish Dominican. In some ways he stands on the shoulders of Rahner. His early book, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God<sup>3</sup> has a sacramental perspective that is very similar to that of Rahner. Often described as a contemporary political theologian, Schillebeeckx moves us further by bringing in the social and political dimensions of the human person. His focus is not just the human person, but the human community, and what he calls the humanum, that is, what constitutes a truly "livable humanity" in the face of the radical and senseless suffering and injustice in our world. Schillebeeckx's contemporary writings have a different starting point and answer different questions from those of his earlier sacramental theology. We will look briefly at how Schillebeeckx's contribution offers insights that go beyond Rahner's anthropology.

Then this evening I would like to speak about the contribution of women theologians.<sup>4</sup> There will not be one name in particular, although I will be drawing to a large extent from a theologian who has done great work in our own country, Elizabeth Johnson. Two of her recent books I would highly recommend: her book on the Trinity entitled She Who Is<sup>5</sup> which is a retrieval of Thomas in ways that many people thought were unthinkable. From the context of feminist theology, Johnson "braids a footbridge" not only to Thomistic theology, but even to Thomistic *philosophy*. She gets the name for the book, in fact from a feminist gloss on Aquinas's naming of God as *Qui est*. Yet that always has been translated "He who is." Johnson retrieves the whole idea of God as the dynamic act of Being, and asks: "Could we think of God as the dynamic Relational Love at the heart of the universe — Compassion-poured-out on the universe"? What would happen for our spirituality and for the dignity and respect for women that Sr. Mary Jeremiah spoke about, if we could also image God, not *instead* of "He who is" but in *addition* to "He who is" as "She who is"? Can the female images and speaking about God, in fact, open up to us in new ways the incomprehensibility of God who is beyond male and female? She also has done another small book called Women, Earth and Creator Spirit<sup>6</sup> which does a fine job of incorporating the ecological perspective also emphasized by Sr. Mary Jeremiah.



## *Theology in a New Context*

To put all this in context I'd like to make reference to the work of Bernard Lonergan, the Canadian Jesuit who died in the same year that Karl Rahner died, 1984. Bernard Lonergan wrote an important article called "*Theology in its New Context*."<sup>7</sup> In this article Lonergan refers to "the shift from classical to historical consciousness." Lonergan draws attention to the fact that theology, at the beginning of this century (the way both he and Rahner would have been schooled, for example, as good Thomists in their seminary training) was a form of Thomism now called "neo-scholasticism."

That approach to our topic did not speak about the human person, but rather about human nature. Nevertheless, when you focus on the *Summa Theologiae* itself, rather than on later seminary manuals, you see the richness of Thomas engaging the questions of his day. Thomas was not afraid to deal with one whom Luther called "that damn pagan Aristotle." Thomas was convinced that we must search for and engage truth wherever it is to be found. For him this meant grappling with Aristotle as well as being open to Islamic thought. In our own day we are just entering into Christian-Muslim dialogue; Thomas was engaged in it in the thirteenth century. Thomas encouraged his students to be open to the many opinions that did not agree with one another and to engage them always in the form of questions so as always to be open to greater truth. Only then would Thomas, who was rooted in his own contemplative life and prayer and tradition, make his own critical judgment. He realized that it was a limited judgment, that he did not have the fullness of truth, but he embraced the responsibility that we all have to speak the truth as we see it. We do that in community so that we can be challenged by each other's perspectives in the common search for truth.

Lonergan emphasizes that with Thomas we had a searching for truth through questions, but in the later manuals the process was reversed. The manuals took Thomas's answers which came from the thirteenth century and made them the answers. Then Scripture and tradition were used to show the truth of the "official answers" of Church teaching. In the modern context of the Enlightenment we again began to trust the power of human reason to question and to doubt. In one sense this can be seen as a return to the basic method of asking questions and searching for truth.

In terms of anthropology, a traditional Thomistic perspective, rooted in Aristotelian philosophy, spoke of human "nature" and the "essence" of what it meant to be human. Lonergan notes that one of the major shifts in the modern perspective is to begin to talk about the human person rather than unchanging, universal human nature. When we spoke in terms of "natures" for instance, we talked about the human being as a "rational animal." It is certainly true that we have intellects and wills and that we share a great deal in common with the animals. We belong to that genus. Yet, when we talked about the human person as "composed of body and soul," and having an unchanging, universal human essence, all sorts of other aspects of being human did not come to the fore. For example, the facts that we each have a history and live in different periods of history seemed somewhat incidental because we focused on unchanging nature. The fact that we come from different cultures was also considered an "accident" in that system of essences and natures. The fact that someone is from the Philippines or from South Africa or from Northern Ireland or from Germany or from different regions of the United States or from different ethnic groups (what we now call "social location") was all considered incidental, rather than essential, to who we are. Gender and race were also not so important because we have a "common human nature." All these things that are becoming such a focus in our day in terms of the human person were not attended to in that system. They were not important; they did not make a fundamental difference in terms of our human personhood. The emphasis was on

unchanging human nature or essence composed of a body and soul, human nature as rational, and human freedom in terms of free will.

### *KARL RAHNER: Starting with the Human*

I would like to take just those three pieces from Lonergan's article and shift to Karl Rahner and try to highlight some of his major emphases that he shifted in terms of our understanding the human person. You will note a number of connections with what Sr. Mary Jeremiah said about the image of God, divinization, our experience of grace, and our call to share the Trinitarian life.

First, human nature versus history. Rahner stressed that we exist in history; that is the very way by which we become a person. It is also the very way by which Jesus became a human person. So when Rahner speaks about the Incarnation, for example, he says it took all of Jesus' lifetime for him to live out a history of being who he was. That does not mean he became God at the end of his history. We are not talking about the heresy of Adoptionism. What we are talking about is an historical mind-set that says I am not yet who I am called to be, because it takes my whole history, all the decisions of my life, for me to become the person whom God has destined me to be.<sup>8</sup> History refers not to our surroundings; but to our very opportunity to become who we are, to say our fundamental "yes" or "no" to God. We do that with the whole of our life. At death our history is sealed. He have been given so many days, and so many years. At the moment of our death what we have made of our whole life is a fundamental "yes" or "no" to God. At the same time this is also a fundamental "yes" or "no" to our neighbor and a fundamental "yes" or "no" to our own deepest truth and happiness. Thomas' insight from the very beginning was that life is a quest for happiness. Our vocation is to become genuinely free, which is to become the very person whom God wants us to be. One of Rahner's important contributions to the theology of the human person is that the human person becomes who he or she is destined to be through his/her history.

Second, rather than speaking of the human being as composed of body and soul, Rahner refers to the human person as body-spirit. We are not spirits "caught" in a body. We are not Platonists. It is not the idea that we are souls entrapped in a body just waiting to get back to our truly spiritual home. This concept takes the Incarnation totally seriously and says that God's plan includes creation and incarnation. We are, as some philosophers and theologians would say, a mysterious combination of the bodily and the spiritual. But this involves a profound unity of spirit and matter. God then, is to be discovered for us as *human beings*, because we are *not* pure spirits, but we are body-spirits. We cannot meet God as angels or as pure spirits. We always meet God in and through our bodies; in and through our social world; in and through our history; in and through creation. That is the basic idea of sacramentality – the mystery of God who remains incomprehensible is made known to us in and through creation. Augustine says, the footprints of the Trinity are to be discovered everywhere in creation and in a privileged way in the creation that is the image and likeness of God – the human person. So we discover God in relationship to one another. This is at the heart of Rahner's further insight that love of God and love of neighbor are in fact the same love. He takes very seriously that idea from the first letter of John: "The one who says that he or she loves God but hates a neighbor is a liar." (1 Jn 4:20) Rahner says the reason that is the case is that we meet God in and through our neighbor. Our neighbor is often the one whom we least suspect; it is the stranger, it is those often to whom we are not immediately attracted, the other, the poor, the little one. It is in and through love of our neighbor that we love God. This insight is of course rooted in Matthew 25 where we are reminded that Christ is to be discovered in the hungry brother or sister, in the person who is sick

and longing for a visit, in the dying, in the poor, in the prisoner. The mystery of God is to be found embodied in God's creation and in all of God's creatures, and in particular in the human person.

A third insight of Rahner's relates to the notion of freedom. In the classical mind-set a person is a rational animal who *has* a free will. Rahner shifts that language and says: to be a person is to be a *center* of self-consciousness and freedom.

In Rahner's essay on "Theology of Freedom"<sup>9</sup> he says freedom isn't something we have; rather, "we are freedom." In the core of our being we have been created as profoundly free, but as Augustine taught us, that is "freedom for something." Freedom is not just the ability to choose this or that. Freedom is freedom for God, which is at the same time freedom to become who we are destined to be, and freedom for our neighbor. So it is the freedom to be who I am meant to be and freedom for my neighbor which is in fact freedom for God. Rahner's response to the question "What is demanded of me?" is: "I am." In other words, it is not that God has some blueprint of what I should do in all the turning points of my life. It is more profound than that. God has a vision of who I am called to be.

In another essay on a "formal existential ethics"<sup>10</sup> Rahner addresses the question from moral theology: "is there something which is demanded of all human beings by our very nature? That is the whole idea of the natural law. Rahner argues that the notion of an "individual ethic" as a fundamental option is much more demanding. Whatever is humanly decent and right and good is still demanded of me. But that does not begin to touch what my vocation is. That's just the bottom line. In fact beyond that there is the unique vocation of every individual human person. Each of us had been called by name. Each of you has received the vocation to be a cloistered Dominican sister, but it goes beyond that because you are called to be "Sister Margaret" and "Mother Rose" and that is a different reflection of that same vocation. So each of us is called to be faithful to the God who speaks to us in the depths of our hearts.

### *THE ONE MYSTERY: God Is Love*

In all of his writings Rahner expressed a deep pastoral concern, as the following quotation reveals:

I believe that all the difficulties which men and women of today experience have a common basis. Theological expressions are not formulated in such a way that they can see how what is being said has any connection with their own understanding of themselves which they have derived from their experience.<sup>11</sup>

Rahner is saying that in his day Catholics thought that there were a number of truths or dogmas they had to believe on the (ultimate) authority of the God who was doing the revealing and the (proximate) authority of the magisterium that defined those dogmas. On the one hand were "mysteries" or "dogmas" that you have to believe. On the other hand people have their own human experience. In terms of our focus on the human person we have on the one hand, Christian teaching about what it means to be human, and on the other hand, our own social and cultural perceptions of what human life is all about. Most people don't see any connection between the two. Rahner made it his life project to say: "There not only happens to be some connection between the two; it is an essential connection. There is a necessary connection." In fact, Rahner argued that, properly understood, "all theology is anthropology." For Rahner, all theology begins with human experience. That makes some people very nervous. They think it is reductionistic to focus on "the human." They fear that theology will become self-centered rather than God-centered. Rahner, however, was convinced that if we explored the mystery of



the human person in depth, we would discover the mystery of God. Faith is not a matter of believing a number of different mysteries. There is only one mystery at the heart of it all. All those dogmas, all those mysteries go back to the *One Mystery*, that is the mystery of the Trinity. What is this mystery of the Trinity, which is the mystery of God? Rahner says quite simply, in the words of St. John, it is the three words, "God is love." (1 Jn 4:8) This is the heart of what people really need to know, he says, that "God is love."

Now where did we, as Christians learn the truth that God is love? We learned it through the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Word made flesh. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we discover that this God who is love is self-communicating love. In other words, God is not a distant, absent love, but a God who pours God's self out even to the point of death. Therefore, one way into the mystery of God is by studying the mystery of Jesus or Christology. But Rahner says, how can we even have the openness to follow Jesus or even to hear the name of Jesus? How do we receive the Word that is proclaimed to us? This is possible only because the Spirit has been poured forth in our hearts, making us open. We have been anointed with the Spirit. Here we are approaching Pentecost. So all the richness of the liturgy points out to us this whole idea of what the Spirit does. It melts what has been frozen; it makes supple, open and flexible what has been hard, rigid and stiff.<sup>12</sup> The Spirit opens up not only our hearts, but also all of creation. The Spirit is operative in the world and certainly the Spirit is operative in the Church, but also the Spirit is operative in the heart of the human person. In Jesus and in the Spirit we have come to know the one mystery of God who is love. And Rahner says that every other mystery or dogma you want to talk about is somehow connected to the heart of the matter – the God who is self-communicating love.

While those insights resonate with those who are deeply committed Christians and Catholics, those who have embraced a deep spiritual life, and a "religious life," Rahner remarks that that is not the experience of many people. For many people it would be better to start by saying what does it really mean "to be a human person?" The way Rahner analyzes the human person is to point out what Thomas got from Augustine: it is in our knowing and in our loving that we most profoundly image the God who is the Word, or the knowledge of God, and the Spirit who is the love of God poured forth. So the way we image God as human persons is in our consciousness or in our knowing and in our loving.

Rahner begins his analysis of the human person with the simple observation that, "A human person asks questions."<sup>13</sup> But did you ever not know enough to ask a question? We've all had that experience. And Rahner says, that's because to ask a question presumes something is there already. In other words, there is a dynamism to asking a question. You know a certain amount and you learn something new; and all of a sudden it does not fit together. That's when you have a question. There is something there that is giving energy and that is rising up, so that you ask a question. If we analyze that process of human beings asking questions we can see that what Rahner calls "the mystery of being" is already within us; that we already have contact with what it is we are searching for.

Rahner says the core of the human person in biblical terms is our heart. This human being has a question. But the reason this human being has a question is because what we are searching for is a horizon beyond us. But that horizon is already deep within our hearts, rising up and prompting us to ask that question. So we try to answer our questions by going to school, or inviting in theology speakers, or talking to someone we consider wise, or reading a book, or taking a correspondence course, or asking our parents or friends, or in numerous other ways. That's how we try to answer our questions. But we are not just questions, we're not just minds. Rahner says, more profoundly, we are all searching for love. It is not just knowing that shows we are moving toward something beyond us; it is our loving and our desire for love. So we befriend



our brothers and sisters. The first love is the love of our parents and our family for us. Then we go out of ourselves and we make friends. And maybe we fall in love. We also befriend the poor and the needy and are befriended by them. In all of these experiences, when we are going out of ourselves in knowing or in loving we are seeking what seems to be beyond us, but the only reason we are seeking is because, in fact, that horizon of love is already within us prompting us to search for love, or prompting us to seek answers to our questions. Very simply, Augustine said it long ago: "Our hearts are restless until we rest in Thee."

Many philosophers might agree that human persons ask questions and seek for love. But at this point in his analysis Rahner admits that there are two possibilities. One of them is that human life is absurd, because we spend our whole life in this searching for what appears to be beyond us. Nevertheless the most intimate human relationship in marriage or otherwise, does not fulfill our deep longing for love. With our closest friend or in experiences of community we still have a fundamental loneliness and quest within us for love. We never find an answer, in spite of the information glut, to all those questions that are deep within us. So one possibility is that the human person is absurd because we spend our lives seeking, but we never resolve that search. We die and that is the end. That is one philosophical position, which ultimately ends in nihilism. There is nothingness and we are at best, tragic heroes. But Rahner points out that nihilism is as much a faith option as is Christian faith; neither can be proven to be true. Christian faith wagers that life is not absurd. We long for God precisely because we have been destined for what is beyond us — the Infinite. Beyond death we fall into the hands of the living God who *is* the answer to our search. If in fact, God is self-communicating love, then the questions that we are (Rahner says we just don't have questions, we *are* questions) are *questions toward God*. There fore as human persons destined for God, we can trust our restlessness, trust our doubts, trust our questions, because they may be leading us toward a deeper experience of the mystery of God. We *are* questions. But God is, we believe in and through Jesus, the answer to those questions. For Rahner the Incarnation is at the center of that connection.

### *The Incarnation as Key*

Most of us have the idea that in Christ the humanity and the divinity are like a see-saw. If we really believe in the divinity of Jesus we think he can't be quite human in the way I am. He didn't really experience this. He didn't really struggle with loneliness or with his sexuality or with anger or with not liking certain people; whatever might be one's own way of naming the struggle. He didn't really go through it the way the story is told of Gethsemane, of really not wanting to do the Father's will. Yes, in the end "Thy will be done," but first "take this cup from Me." He didn't really mean that — that is only for our edification. We think in terms of dualism and oppositions. But Rahner maintains that the Incarnation reveals to us that divinity and humanity do not operate in *inverse* proportion. They are not opposites. In fact, if the Incarnation is true, then what that means is divinity and humanity operate in *direct* proportion. In other words, the closer to God one is, the more fully human that person is.

Think for a minute of the most profoundly spiritual sister that you have met in your monastery, or person you have met in your life. Who is the most deeply religious person you have ever met? Now think for a moment who is the most deeply human, compassionate and earthy person you have ever met? What Rahner is getting at is that you should be able to think of the same person. In other words, being fully, authentically human, rather than taking us away from God or distracting us from God, in fact leads us more deeply into the mystery of God. And closeness to God makes us more profoundly human.

Rahner also reminds us of a key insight from the Greek early Christian tradition: God became human "so that we might become divine."<sup>14</sup> Second Peter 1:4 says, "we become partakers in the divine nature." Rahner has a very positive, graced view of the human person. He sees us as not only questions toward God, but also as openness for the Incarnation, or desire for God. That is the way we are created, every single one of us. That is the heart of what he means by the "supernatural existential." Quite simply, all it means is that every human person, not just the baptized, from the first moment of his or her existence is offered friendship with God. We are all born as destined for God, oriented toward God, called to God's grace. How do we respond to that offer? We do it with the whole of our human lives, by the way we respond to our neighbors, by the way we respond to the events of our lives and the people we were given in the limited time that we have. That is how we say "yes" or "no" to that deep call that has been there from the first moment of our existence. In that process of growing in grace, responding to grace, saying our "yes" to God, we are in fact divinized.

Here Rahner picks up the Eastern tradition. We learned so much about grace in relation to sin, because we got a lot of that from the Western tradition through Augustine, who was much more sin-centered in his theology of grace. He talked about grace as redemption and forgiveness and that is certainly true and essential; but at the same time the Eastern tradition (eg. Irenaeus, Athanasius) emphasized another aspect of the mystery of grace, i.e., divinization. We are not only forgiven and redeemed, we are called to participate in the divine nature. To put it in terms of Jesus: "he is by nature what we are by grace." Therefore Rahner talks about "ordinary" mysticism; who Christ is, is who we are called to become. We are called to the very same relationship with the Trinity that Jesus had, which is participation in the divine nature. Rahner makes his meaning more concrete in his article *"The Experience of Grace."* There he highlights that everyone has access to the experience of grace. Many have had experiences of grace, but they never name it "grace." They do not have that language for it.

Let me quote one lengthy paragraph from Rahner on what the experience of grace feels like or looks like in many people's ordinary lives. Rahner asks:

Have we ever kept quiet, even though we wanted to defend ourselves when we were being unfairly treated? Have we ever forgiven someone, even though we got no thanks for it and our silent forgiveness was taken for granted? Have we ever obeyed, not because we had to, and because otherwise things would have become unpleasant for us; but simply on account of that mysterious, silent, incomprehensible Being we call "God" and God's will? Have we ever sacrificed something without receiving any thanks or recognition for it, and even without a feeling of inner satisfaction? Have we ever been absolutely lonely? Have we ever decided on some course of action purely by the innermost judgement of our conscience, deep down where one can no longer tell or explain it to anyone; where one is quite alone and knows that one is taking a decision that no one else can take in one's place and for which one will have to answer for all eternity? Have we ever tried to love God when we are no longer being borne on the crest of the wave of enthusiastic feeling; when it is no longer possible to mistake ourself and our vital urges for God? Have we ever tried to love God when we thought we were dying of this love and it seemed like death and almost negation? Have we ever tried to love God when we seem to be calling out into emptiness; when our cries seemed to fall on deaf ears and it looked as if we were taking a terrifying jump into the bottomless abyss? Everything seemed incomprehensible and absolutely senseless. Have we ever fulfilled a duty when it seemed it could be done only by a consuming sense of really betraying and obliterating one's self? When it could apparently be done only by doing something terribly stupid for which no one would thank us? Have we ever tried to be good to

someone, who did not show the slightest sign of gratitude or comprehension, and when we were not rewarded by having that feeling of having been absolutely selfless or decent? Let us search for ourselves in such experiences in our life. Let us look for our experiences in which things like this have happened to us. If we have had such experiences, then we have experienced the Spirit in the way I mean here.<sup>15</sup>

Once when I read that passage in a Master's level class, a young mother asked: "Does he ever talk about mothers and diaper pails? I've got kids at home, and I have these pressures, and I am trying to finish this degree because I think I'm called to be a minister." I said to her: "You have to write that article." Rahner wrote out of his own experience as a Jesuit seeking to find God in all things. But we have to write other descriptions of grace from our own different experiences of life.

*EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX:  
Encountering God in History and Suffering*

When Schillebeeckx was in the Dominican novitiate in Belgium, he wrote home to his parents, who were parents of fourteen children, and told them of this profound religious experience he had had when the brothers got up during the night to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the dark. He never before had had such a close experience of God, he said. His father wrote back and said: "My boy, your mother and I have to get up three or four times a night to calm a crying baby, and that is less romantic than your night office. Think about it: religion is not an emotional state but an attitude of service."<sup>16</sup>

Schillebeeckx's early theology, like Rahner's is profoundly sacramental. The title of one of Schillebeeckx's early books captures this sacramental leitmotif: Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery.<sup>17</sup> The point of the whole book is summed up in the word "and." In other words, the human reality of marriage is at the same time the sacramental encounter with God. The sexual experience, the raising of the children, the wrestling with the relationship and trying to stay faithful over all those years, the working out of the difficulties of marriage, the dailiness, the changing of diapers, the making of meals — all of that is the context for the experience of the grace of marriage. There is not some portion of our lives where we go to church on Sunday or pray or withdraw in a retreat experience, and that is our "spiritual" life while the rest of life is "secular." Grace flows throughout our lives, and we encounter the mystery of God in the concrete experiences of our lives. Schillebeeckx's early works all reflect this notion of sacramentality: the mystery of God is encountered in the one human world in we live.

But in his later writings, Schillebeeckx grappled with the reality that two-thirds of the world's humanity suffers injustice in some way. Schillebeeckx now does theology always in the context of radical and senseless suffering. He admits that some suffering draws us closer to God; it is a genuine experience of the cross and of being profoundly united with God. But not all suffering does that. His focus is on how we can talk about God or full human life in the face of the kind of suffering that is truly de-humanizing and in the face of the global injustices that in fact destroy human persons. One example would be the use of rape, for instance, as a weapon of war in Bosnia. That horror was meant both to destroy a people ethnically, and also to dehumanize and dominate the people and specifically the women. In that kind of suffering there is nothing of God. There is no way we can say, "Let's find God's mysterious purpose here." The reality of rape is evil; it is not of God. Schillebeeckx talks about the concentration camps, the Holocaust, or racial discrimination as examples of radical suffering. In the movie Romero there is the young woman toward the end of the movie who was an activist for the reign of God, preaching the Gospel in those social and political circumstances. Before she was murdered, she was raped



and her tongue was cut out so that she couldn't even scream. Her tongue was what she had used to speak out against the injustice. The effect of that kind of torture is the kind of thing that Schillebeeckx means by "radical and senseless suffering."

In the light of that kind of experience, can we speak of the mystery of God to be found in everyone's experience? Or do we have just privileged experiences of those who live comfortable and religious lives to which we can apply this kind of theology that says God is found in our ordinary experience? Schillebeeckx shows that perhaps we need another way of thinking of the experience of God. He introduces a term about God being found in negative experiences — experiences of radical suffering, of injustice, of genuine evil. God is to be found in those experiences, but he calls them "negative-contrast experiences." because they are the exact contrast of what God wills for humanity. The will of God for human beings as Irenaeus described it was full human happiness: "the glory of God is humanity fully alive."<sup>18</sup> God's desire is the flourishing of human persons and the flourishing of all creation. Anything that destroys a human person or part of a human person or destroys creation is a violation of God's will.

That is why Schillebeeckx takes the cross as the paradigmatic negative contrast experience. He has quite a different theology of the cross from Karl Rahner. Schillebeeckx begins with the human life of Jesus, the preacher of the reign of God. Jesus treated every human person with dignity and invited even sinners and outcasts into intimacy with God and the celebration and joy of the kingdom of God. But both political and religious leaders were distressed by the social and religious revolution that was the reign of God he proclaimed. Schillebeeckx says that from a human perspective the death of Christ was evil: it was brought about by political and religious leaders rejecting the God that Jesus preached. Where then was God to be found in the "negative contrast experience" of the cross? Schillebeeckx identifies the Spirit as the one who enabled Jesus to go through what was an experience of evil and absurdity and meaninglessness, but to fill that experience with love — the love of God outpoured. Jesus died trusting in Abba, remaining faithful to his mission, and expressing solidarity with all who suffer, symbolized by his dying between two thieves. God is to be found not in the human injustice that caused the cross, but in the Spirit of God who sustained Jesus to go through the experience of darkness, rejection, and death, and to trust Abba to be faithful.

Finally, God is to be found in the resurrection. We as Christians only celebrate the cross because we believe that it has been defeated in the resurrection. The resurrection says that God has the final word and that God is a God of life. Schillebeeckx reminds us that that promise extends to all the rest of the crucified people of our world, and to us when we go through experiences of radical suffering or injustice. God is the power of love who sustains and enables us to endure, to protest, and to hope. The grace and action of the Spirit enables us to resist and to try to change whatever structures make God's creation suffer. But also God is there as the promise of the future. The resurrection says that God can and will make all things new and bring life even out of death.

One major contribution of Schillebeeckx's theology of the human person is that he attends to the suffering of humanity. Schillebeeckx and the social and political theologians remind us that we meet God in community, not only in our religious communities, but in the community of human kind and of creation. Schillebeeckx's concern about salvation extends not only to the individual human person but to human communities and structures and to the earth, particularly wherever injustice or evil has been done to God's beloved creation. All of that has to be the focus of our prayer and of our compassion, of our concern and activity on behalf of the reign of God.<sup>19</sup>

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## NOTES

1. This talk was transcribed from the tape and reviewed by Sr. Mary Catherine.
2. Eugene Kennedy, "Quiet Mover of the Catholic Church," New York Times, Section 6, September 23, 1979, 22-24, 31-32.
3. Edward Schillebeeckx, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).
4. The evening presentation is not included in this transcription of the talk.
5. Elizabeth A. Johnson, SHE WHO IS: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse (New York: Crossroad, 1992). See also Johnson, "The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female," Theological Studies 45 (1984) 441-65.
6. Elizabeth A. Johnson, Women, Earth and Creator Spirit (New York: Paulist, 1993).
7. Bernard J.F. Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context," A Second Collection, ed. William F.J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 55-67.
8. From a theological perspective it should be emphasized that these decisions are ways in which we cooperate or fail to cooperate with grace.
9. Karl Rahner, "Theology of Freedom," Theological Investigations Vol. 6 (New York: Seabury, 1974) 178-196.
10. Karl Rahner, "On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics," Theological Investigations Vol. 2 (New York: Seabury, 1975) 217-234.
11. Karl Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology," in The Word in History, ed. T. Patrick Burke (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966) 18.
12. See Sequence of the Mass of Pentecost.
13. See Karl Rahner, Spirit in the World (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968). For helpful introductions to Rahner's anthropology, see Anne E. Carr, "Starting with the Human," and William V. Dych, "Theology in a New Key," in A World of Grace, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (New York: Seabury, 1980), 1-30.
14. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 4.28.1.
15. Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Experience of Grace," Theological Investigations Vol. 3 (New York: Seabury, 1974), 86-90.
16. John Bowden, Edward Schillebeeckx: In Search of the Kingdom of God (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 26.

17. Edward Schillebeeckx, Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966).

18. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 4.20.7.

19. The presentation on Schillebeeckx's theology continued in the evening session, but that portion of the talk was not recorded. One helpful resource for fuller discussion of this topic is Edward Schillebeeckx, On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

# Philosophy



MAY, 1996

The TRUTH of a philosophy depends on the extent to which it recognizes BEING as a gift from God, the source of all BEING.

SISTER MARIA AGNES

Too hastily we politely abandon necessary public discourse and genuine disagreement rather than wrestle for the benediction of TRUTH.

michael demkovich





## PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES SHAPING LIFE TODAY

### OUR CONTEMPLATIVE QUEST FOR TRUTH FROM A DOMINICAN PERSPECTIVE

Sr. Maria Agnes, O.P.  
Summit

We are all familiar with the story of St. Antony of Egypt who left his cell in the desert to go and visit a fellow hermit, St. Paul of Thebes, who was then a hundred years old and had not seen a human being for years. Paul probably asked Antony, "How are things going in the world? Do people still build towns and cities?" In this assembly we are asking one another the same question. "How are things going in the world today and what are we doing about it?"

The world we live in is being configured by demographics, global economy, multicultural evolution and a rapid explosion of knowledge in every field due to science and technology. People now have access to all parts of the earth through modern transportation and through the electronic superhighway: the internet, computer modem, E-mail, fax machine, and television to name a few. Behind us are centuries of scientific progress, philosophical diversity and 2,000 years of Christianity. The twentieth century has been deeply wounded by two world wars, the experience of concentration camps, natural disasters, social and economic upheaval, the nuclear threat to our planet, ecological crisis and horrendous attacks on human life. The idolatry of ancient civilizations is prevalent in our society in a modernized version. The secular image of man looms over the horizon of cyberspace. Modern man sees himself as his own creation and as one who is in charge of life and death. There is a lack of stability, regulation and permanent commitment in our society. The image of the Trinity as model of community has been distorted by the break-up of family life. In the realm of religious belief, many people think that all religions are equally valid because for them, religion is but an expression of a particular culture and a projection of man's subjective consciousness. The cultural climate of our age is characterized by theological pluralism, moral relativism, secular humanism, and a large marketplace of philosophies of different color, texture and flavor.

During our century, many books and articles have been written and published about the cultural crisis of our time. The philosophical influences that are shaping our culture have been diagnosed, examined and discussed in seminars, lectures and workshops. There are lights and shadows, good and evil, life and death in our culture. We can look at these polarities from two different perspectives: from below, through science and philosophy, and from above, through revealed **truth**. We are looking at the world through faith and reason, not in juxtaposition but in convergence. Reason without faith is rationalism. Faith without reason is fideism.

This morning, we are at the intersection of philosophy and culture. Culture is the context for philosophy and philosophy interprets culture. The fundamental and ultimate questions in philosophy have not changed through the centuries. The burning issue at the heart of philosophy is the question: what is **truth**? We belong to a Religious Order dedicated to the study, contemplation and preaching of **truth**. The fullness of **truth** cannot be possessed by a neutral mind. **Truth** is in the language, in the thought, in moral decision, in human action. Crisis in **truth** leads to crisis in faith, in morals, in contemplation. **Truth** is profoundly dynamic because it is a way of life, a praxis, according to the vision of St. Dominic whose Religious Order grew out of his passion for **truth**. St. Dominic bore witness to **truth**, the Word of God, in his being and through his preaching. Over the centuries, we Dominicans have pursued this ideal in philosophy and theology, in the arts and sciences, in liturgy and contemplation.

St. Thomas Aquinas, the medieval philosopher, theologian and poet, accepted the universality of **truth**. He drew from Sacred Scripture, the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church, the Arabian, Jewish and Neoplatonic philosophers, and the works of Aristotle in laying down his great synthesis of the Christian faith. His metaphysics of personality, creation and divine providence are based on Aristotelian philosophy. For St. Thomas, anything true is a reflection of the first and ultimate **truth** even if it is discovered by a pagan. On the other hand, a falsehood does not become true when uttered by a Christian. The writings of St. Thomas were influenced by the scientific worldview and the doctrinal controversies of his time. His cultural milieu was shaped and enriched by the flourishing universities in Europe, by the Roman Curia, the court of King Louis IX in France and the grandeur of Gothic architecture and polyphonic music. The dignity, balance and harmony of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris are cultural symbols manifested in the order, logic and synthesis of the **Summa Theologiae**. As a poet, St. Thomas wrote some of the eucharistic hymns in the liturgy.

St. Catherine of Siena, the fourteenth century mystic, discovered her true self and the beauty of the human soul in the fountain of the gentle first **Truth**. Catherine lived in a world of materialism, heresy, false mysticism and political turmoil both in the Church and in society. She taught her disciples to seek the **truth**, to love the **truth**, and to live by the **truth**. In her mystical prayer, Catherine experienced altered states of consciousness that open out to infinite realms of **truth**. Her active apostolate was totally influenced by her mystical experience of **truth** as a Person.

Blessed John of Fiesole, the artist, lived at the time of the great revival in art, literature and learning in Europe. It was a period of transition from the medieval to the modern world. Fra Angelico preached his gospel homilies through the splendor of early Renaissance art. The encounter between the **truth** of the gospel and the culture of his time became the focus of his paintings and prayer life.

Bartolome de las Casas, the social reformer, witnessed to God's **truth**, justice and compassion during a period of evangelization, colonization and expansion of European culture in the New World. De las Casas confronted the ignorance and falsehood in the Church and the injustice in his own government. He followed Christ who is **truth**. He preached the Word of God who is **Truth Incarnate** and who had become flesh in the native peoples of the Americas. In his rapidly changing world, de las Casas listened to and acted upon the Word of God already present in his culture.

Monasticism has a pearl of great price to offer the Church and the world today. The Dominican monastic contemplative life embodies much that is good in contemporary thought: a spirit of openness to dialogue, a respect for the dignity and uniqueness of the human person as embodied in our Rule and Constitutions, an affirmation of pluralism and diversity in our community life, a democratic form of government, a concern for freedom and authenticity in our monastic observances, and a desire for simplicity of life in oneness of mind and heart.

Monastic erudition combined with discretion is our non-polemical response to the philosophical influences that are shaping our culture. Dialogue is possible through love. Love is not blind and is able to see the **truth**. No philosophy is totally false. There are grains of **truth** mixed with errors and deficiencies in ancient, medieval and modern philosophy. It is our task to separate the cockle from the wheat. It is possible to find a philosophy which is compatible with our Christian faith if we remain faithful to our search for **truth** wherever it may be found. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Both the tradition and modern philosophy are so rich that living water can be drawn from the rock at innumerable points provided only that an original thinker is at hand to strike the rock." St. Paul tells us to "test everything and retain what is good" (Thess. 5:21). He also speaks of "taking captive all human systems of thought for the **truth** of Christ" (2Cor. 10:5). Jesus Christ taught us the **way**, the **truth** and the **life** as embodied in his own Person. All aspects of **truth** are a reflection of the innermost core of **truth** as it is presented to us by Christ through the teaching of the Church.

There is a natural level of philosophy accessible to all of us. This commonsense philosophy is refined through study and reflection. Through study we learn how philosophy, theology and contemplation are interrelated in revealing the mystery of Christ. The study of natural and divine **truth** enables us to deal with theological pluralism, moral relativism and secular humanism. Philosophy interprets the different periods and cultures in our Dominican history and shows us how these affect our monastic life today.

A sound metaphysics of **being** is necessary both for the understanding and the practice of our Catholic faith. Our culture has shifted from the mystery of **being** to the pragmatic reality of doing and producing. The **truth** of a philosophy depends on the extent to which it recognizes **being** as a gift from God who is the source of all **being**. The daily eucharistic liturgy bears witness to a created



universe which brings up the reality and absoluteness of God. We proclaim the preamble of our faith at the Creed of the Mass. In our present culture, the mastery of the earth is being exercised by people whose minds have been darkened by the absence of God, thus resulting in ecological disaster. At the Offertory of the Mass, we affirm our stewardship of the fruits of the earth symbolized by the bread and wine. We affirm the dignity of creation and of human labor in the presence of the living God. The Consecration of the bread and wine is the supreme moment of encounter between faith and reason, between God and humanity in the mystery of Transubstantiation. At Holy Communion, we proclaim the **truth** that love and **being** are inseparable. **Being** is creative love and love is the essence of **being**.

At the Liturgy of the Hours, we assert the primacy of God in praise, adoration, dependence and thanksgiving. Through the use of our body in worship, after the example of St. Dominic, we affirm the unity of matter and spirit in response to the dualism between mind and body in modern philosophy. Prayer is the official language of a creature. Our monastic search for God in prayer and **lectio divina** is also a revelation of God. Contrary to the teaching of some philosophers, we put ourselves in contact with God when we pray because God is both inscrutable and knowable; he is both hidden and manifest. God is a Person, the object of our quest for truth, of our love and perpetual adoration in the Blessed Sacrament.

Philosophy is a love of wisdom. It is also the wisdom that is loved. Moreover, philosophy teaches its own wisdom because it is the synthesis of all knowledge operating in the light of faith. According to St. Augustine, the true philosopher is one who loves God, the divine wisdom. St. Thomas says the same thing in different words: "The entire purpose of philosophy is the knowledge and love of God." The ultimate end of our search for **truth** is union with God who is the absolute fullness of **truth**. **Truth** is the God of love. In the light of the monastic paradigm, this search for **truth** through study, contemplation and silent preaching is our on-going response to the philosophical influences that are shaping our culture. ▷◁

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The core message of the above Introductory Talk is contained in my previous article, **THE PHILOSOPHICAL SPECTRUM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN THE LIGHT OF THE MONASTIC PARADIGM** which was published in the 1995 Fall-Winter issue of the Dominican Monastic Search. I refer the reader to the bibliographical notes at the end of that article. My presentation of **truth** through the lives and legacies of our Dominican brothers and sisters has been inspired by **PERSPECTIVES ON TRUTH IN THE DOMINICAN TRADITION**, a graduate course designed and taught by Sister Ruth Caspar, O.P., Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy at Ohio Dominican College. Sister Ruth had given me permission to use and develop this insight in my Introductory Talk. I am grateful to Father Kurt Pritzl, O.P. and Father Norman Fenton, O.P. of the Dominican House of Studies for sharing with me their expertise through our correspondences. Lastly, my collaborative work with Father Michael Demkovich, O.P. in preparing for the General Assembly has been a most uplifting and enriching experience for me. Thank you, Father Mike. Through these exchanges and collaborative effort, philosophy truly comes alive when it is understood at the intersection of truth and the culture out of which it grows.





# PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES SHAPING LIFE TODAY

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Province of St. Albert

## INTRODUCTION

Contemplation, as a personal discipline, does not require the existence of God. One can contemplate mathematics or physics and never glimpse God. On the other hand, religious contemplation holds that there is something more and yet to the Sufi, the Buddhist and the Christian the object of contemplation, this something more, can be quite different. In the Catholic tradition, in which the Dominican Order stands, the object of contemplation is always marked by the Incarnation, or God's revelation in human history. There are two premises I wish to stress. First, Catholic contemplation responds to divine revelation (tradition), some Thou actively disclosing the Divine self throughout history, to a person or people, able to receive this disclosure in a fashion proper to their nature (*quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*). Theologically, the Incarnation, as divine revelation, means something greater than the Nativity (itself a great mystery). I disagree with those who understand the Incarnation to mean Christology, and inadvertently reduce revelation to humanist anthropology. Such a reduction eclipses revelation found in human nature, in the Institutions of the Church, and that found in a hierarchy of existence or creation. My second premise is that Dominican contemplation *qua* Catholic is ordered to an absolute goal or telos, and human existence is part of that ordered movement. Dominican contemplation, as Aquinas tells us, is about ultimate blissfulness, (*beatitudo*, I-II Q.3 art. 5), the contemplation of the highest good. Catherine, in her great Dialogue acknowledged the human soul's ultimate striving as a "hunger for the honor of God and the salvation of souls". Both of my premises can be simply stated as: (1) the enormity of revelation and (2) the absoluteness of the Thou. To borrow from Meister Eckhart "God is in the homeland and we are in the far country".

Now allow me to turn to the task of this paper, the philosophical influences shaping our life and a Christian critique of them. I wish to comment on three points (1) the relation of philosophy to theology in the Roman Catholic tradition; (2) philosophy as a tool for understanding contemporary culture; and (3) the genuinely contemplative character of the speculative intellect.

## PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITION

Since the days of Anselm, the standard definition of theology as faith seeking understanding (*fides quarens intellectum*) has well-served Christianity. It was the Council of Nicea in 325 which moved beyond Biblical understanding alone to Hellenic concepts of the One (*hen*), and substance (*ousia*), much to the displeasure of Tertullian. St. Augustine, the premiere authority (*auctoritas*) in the Christian West, was as much a student of Plato and Neo-Platonism as he was of the Gospels and Ambrose of Milan. And clearly no thinker has matched the magnificent synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy with Augustinian Christianity than has the Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas. So, the role of philosophy, at least for the first thirteen centuries of Christian thought, was that of theology's handmaid and theology itself was the queen of all sciences.

Unfortunately, it was shortly after Aquinas' death in 1274 that the faculty of philosophy at the University of Paris asserted its independence from theology and the service of revelation.<sup>1</sup> Siger of Brabant and others held Reason to be autonomous. The famous notion of two truths, the truth of reason and the truth of faith, made of Christianity a house divided. The next centuries saw Nominalism and Humanism confine revelation to the recesses of subjectivity as the Reformation, Counter-Reformation and finally the Enlightenment ushered in the Ages of Reason and Science.

Perhaps this cult of scientific rationalism is why the Roman Catholic Church is so often depicted as out of touch and criticized for her understanding of the sacredness of human life, her vision of a just social and economic order, or her concern over liberal ideologies. Protestant Christianity, born of Modernity, has so advocated the individualism of secular humanism that theology itself can be reduced to a politics of partisan rhetoric. Roman Catholicism likewise finds itself confronting the individualism (or better put the egoism) of society as many Catholics subscribe to a religious privatism, or a selfish preoccupation with personal rights and freedoms that the communal nature of the *ecclesia* is forgotten. Such unexamined cultural presuppositions are not held by wicked vile people, but by many good, caring and loving women and men. The source of such presuppositions lies, I believe, in a facile acceptance of things at the superficial level, a reduction of arguments and positions to simplistic characterizations. Too hastily we politely abandon necessary public discourse and genuine disagreement rather than allow ourselves to wrestle for the benediction of Truth. Rather, Truth is reduced to the relative position of each consumer and is never allowed to shape the community through common character, through common sense. Education, especially Catholic education, should be about this common pursuit of the True, and should employ all the skills that Wisdom affords. In saying this I am saying nothing less than did Thomas Aquinas in the very first question of his Summa:

As to those truths about God which human reason could discover it was necessary that humanity should be instructed by divine revelation.  
*Ad ea etiam quae de Deo ratione humana investigari possunt, necessarium fuit hominem instrui revelatione divina.* (1a q.1,a.1 Leonine)

And yet today, few Catholics devote themselves to the study of philosophy as an essential tool for doing theology. While previous generations may have made philosophy the privileged dialogue partner of theology, today philosophy is the discipline most discriminated against. This fact should alarm Catholic thinkers.

In his work The Shape of Catholic Theology Aidan Nichols states:

This radical suspicion of philosophy has not been limited to the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, even though it is at its strongest there. ... In Catholicism, similar views have found a more low-key expression in feelings of anxiety or unease in the presence of philosophy, or whenever philosophy has had a marked influence on theology.<sup>2</sup>

In the Roman Catholic tradition, philosophy plays a key role in the doing of theology, so critical is its role that one can honestly say that philosophy is essential to Catholic thought. Again, Nichols comments:

Apart from being a principle of order in theology, philosophy also has a vital part to play in laying the foundations for acceptance of revelation and so in providing the essential groundwork for theological activity. Philosophy is vital to what is called the "preamble of faith," in other words, to the way in which we justify our



acceptance of revelation in the first place. Philosophy has to help theology to get started by showing the basic compatibility of revelation with human rationality.<sup>3</sup>

The challenges of Christian fundamentalism, consumerism, materialism, and relativism all demand a theology that is philosophically informed and open to discussion with various disciplines. Theology, at the service of Roman Catholicism, not only needs the tools of philosophy but the rub, the challenge of philosophy as well. "Philosophy," as one of my professors said, "keeps theology honest." In as much as the philosopher and the theologian study the same objects – human existence, transcendence, ethics (to name a few) – philosophy and theology relate like siblings. The theologian must weigh the arguments of philosophy (and related human sciences). Philosophy is not only a tool for theological understanding, it is also the companion science for understanding culture.

## UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

As we gaze upon our world, the current crisis of culture confronts us. Cultural and multi-cultural issues challenge established institutions, question the established language, and confront the thoughts of a people. This is a bittersweet moment, for all that is new is not good, nor is everything old, bad. Already we meet aspects of our bias toward novelty and the consequent culture of youth.

Philosophy is one of Hagia Sophia's (Holy Wisdom's) gardeners. Lovers of Wisdom serve her well who relentlessly tend to the roots of reality. In this way the theologian and the contemplative share with philosophers a kindred longing to understand the truth of the All. While philosophies shape our culture, they also disclose many aspects about us, who we are. In this section I wish to address three formative aspects of culture which are the philosophical concepts of: Cosmology, History, and Ultimacy. These concepts suggest our present location in the world, our perceived past from which we believe ourselves to have come, and the kind of future we would like to see take shape. Put theologically these philosophical concepts touch upon our sense of Community, Tradition, and Destiny.

The spiritual dimension of contemplative life embraces many aspects and weaves them into a harmonious whole. This spirituality, like the human soul, is restless until it rests in God (to borrow from Augustine). Catholic contemplative life will never be satisfied with only a part, but always hungers after the whole. The danger for us today is not one of innovation but of forgetfulness. In our questing for a spirituality which feels right to us we must be careful not to forget the vast wealth of ideas which we have inherited, the *depositum fidei*. Our American mistrust and prejudice against philosophical thinking jeopardizes our soul's quest for the whole. If we become too pragmatic and functional we will forfeit the intellectual suppleness so necessary for a contemplative spirituality.

It is precisely this philosophical imagining, which must engage our own aggressive concerns for our world if we hope to pursue this quest. Too often it is an easy trap for us to think only in the limited ego-centric categories of our personal experiences and ignore the larger social and historical realities.<sup>4</sup> We tend to think that if something makes sense to us it is true and if we don't understand something it is either false or unimportant. The contemplative quest must embrace the totality, even if we do not clearly understand it, even if our categories of thinking are stale and worn. Philosophical inquiry is essential to our contemplative spirituality especially when it strains the limits of our understanding. Insights, like revelation, penetrate into the dark and forgotten corners of our imagination and flash forth a fuller recognition of what our life means. Since the concepts Cosmology, History, and Ultimacy are truly formative of culture they also

shape or mis-shape one's understanding of Community, Tradition, and Destiny. For this reason I feel obliged to treat at some length these formative concepts of Cosmology, History, and Ultimacy, so brace yourself for the hard march before us.

## "Cosmology"

In our quest for the "Beingness of being", our relationship to and understanding of the world (*cosmos*) becomes extremely significant. Understandings of the cosmos (or cosmology) profoundly determines one's worldview (*weltanschauung*). Our understanding of the cosmos is conceptualized in a variety of philosophical, religious and scientific ways. They provide a sense of belonging, a sense of being at home in the cosmos. How we imagine the cosmos at its most fundamental level profoundly effects our thinking about existence itself. The Medievals believed that the microcosm was linked the macrocosm, and vice versa. The impact that a cosmology has on one's social, economic, political, ecological, historical and cultural convictions is profound. For example, the cosmology of the cloister profoundly effects one's vision of the world. So too, a cosmology of chaos, or Darwinian evolution, or secular humanism, affects one's worldview. As we look out upon the vastness of the cosmos, where do we find ourselves located? A brief survey of how we human beings have looked at the heavens (astronomy) over the centuries will demonstrate this point, and shed light on our notions of History and Ultimacy.

In the West, beginning with Plato's worldview, which held ultimate reality to exist in an Other Worldly realm of Ideas providing the pattern for our sensible world of things, we soon confront the more permanent and scientific worldview of Aristotle. Whereas Plato sought the accumulated wisdom of the cosmos Aristotle systematically and logically sought its causes. But for both, heaven stood above the earth, as a better place to go for those who could make the "climb". By the thirteenth century the cosmology of Ptolemy, combined with Christian theology, had established the cosmos as secured by a vault of fixed ether which held the stars in place above while the sun, the moon and planets ran their course about a fixed and sure earth.

It is not until the 15th century that we see cracks in this great cosmic shell. Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543) was troubled by various inconsistencies present in Ptolemy's cosmology. His work *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* (1543) attempted to correct these errors by placing not the earth at the great center of the cosmos but the sun ("*In medio omnium residit sol*"). This "Copernican revolution" did much more than reveal a new fact about things, it de-centered and de-stabilized the entire cosmos. The popular understanding of the world as obeying a holy hierarchy wherein God set "Man" at its center, and human life as the soul's ascent to God, were shaken. Copernicus disturbed the stable cosmos of Parmenide with his sun-centered (heliocentric) theory. What ensued was a new spirit of exploration that sought to master and chart the earth itself, which now no longer possessed sacred prohibitions, permanence, or stability. Galileo's (1564-1642) position, almost one hundred years after Copernicus, held forth the growing fascination for change which Heraclitus first upheld in fourth century B.C. And Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) went so far as to equate the universe with God, thereby unleashing a cosmos of infinite potentiality (*De l'infinito, universo e mondo*, 1584). His zeal, and the disruptiveness of his worldview, brought about his death as a heretic when he was burned at the stake for pantheistic ideas.

Just when the cosmos seemed to risk dissolution into a chaotic sea of infinite possibilities, Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) restored a sense of permanence to it, yet he allowed it to change, creating new possibilities. His work *Harmonice mundi* (1619) allowed people to have a cosmos of Pythagorean order yet at the same time he introduced the creative energy of musical harmonies. The universe, like a grand symphony, adheres to a divine score.

Each celestial sphere sang its unique theme, together creating the music of the heavens. Kepler gave us the model of a dynamic universe that was both stable and changing.

The mechanical mastery of the seventeenth century reveals a growing dissatisfaction with the Heraclitan's dynamic universe. René Descartes' (1596-1650) emphasis on thought as the proof for personal existence ("cogito ergo sum") compelled him to seek clear and distinct ideas as the criterion of truth. If this were true for "man", then God, in whose image and likeness "man" was created, must also adhere to the same criterion of truth. [Forgive the non-inclusive language at this point but it illustrates the character of these cosmologies.] Descartes' cosmology is built upon clear and distinct premises which are basic to the higher more complicated truths. Rather than seeing the cosmos as the infinity of a perfect whole, demonstrated by the sphere, now the infinite is the mathematical incrementation (1,2,3...), seen in the infinity of a line (this will be important when we treat History as a formative concept). Measurement and precision rendered the cosmos and nature subject to the "tortures of human inquiry" (Francis Bacon, 1561-1626). No longer was the cosmos understood as embracing God but now it has been designed and set in motion by the hand of the Divine Architect who no longer needs to be intimately involved with its workings (the world as automatic). Nature ran its course due to internal structures, regardless of human needs, according to the rules of a disinterested God.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) saw the Divine very active in the masterful design of the world-machine. The sun held the planets in their fixed orbits while the active force of gravity kept us in place. God could remain the perfect and infinite God, while creation too was open to the infinite, yet bound by simplicity and the Divine's laws at work in Nature. Not until the twentieth century with the impact of Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and Quantum Physics will the question of cosmology undergo its most radical change.

This survey highlights not only the concepts of cosmology but also suggests to us the profound emotional and spiritual consequences of one's cosmology. In 1969 E.O. James<sup>5</sup> pointed out that cosmology satisfies an emotional need in humanity for order which sustains the flux of all things. Consequently, caution needs to be taken that we not discredit prior cosmologies, especially those of pre-literate societies, because they seem irrational by our standards. This reflects our bias toward scientific analysis and post-Cartesian categories more than a naive acceptance of foolish myths. I submit that all major religions share in a pre-Enlightenment cosmology, yet they seek to address a post-Enlightenment world. James observes,

By grounding the established order in a supernatural reality and its sanctions, stability is given to the social structures and its institution and organizations making them proof against the disintegrating forces and decay. So long as this is believed and steadfastly maintained no departure from the accepted order is possible. For the native mind this is sufficient reason for the continuation ad infinitum of the observances, rules and regulations duly and irrevocably ordained at the threshold of history, as this is understood, fixed once and for all for all time (E.O.James, p.4)

However, primitive cosmologies are not alone in this power to stabilize culture and society. Modern cosmology (i.e. our scientific worldview) also possesses this power over people even today. The issue of cosmologies is not to be reduced to the past, to do so runs the dangerous risk of oversimplification. To illustrate this last statement one needs only examine their newspaper to see the conflicting cosmologies at work.



## "History"

Cosmologies situate us in our world but the accounts that explain how we got to where we are, are equally formative. Human history can be seen as the dialectical progress of events and peoples which chart an unbroken line of development and cultural growth from point to point. With Hegel and the Modern Age historians gathered artifacts to piece together the silence beyond society's living memory. Their belief was that this historical search presented incontestable scientific evidence for or against Darwinian social evolution. It was not the saving hand of God but the calloused ape-like hands of human progress that brought civilization thus far. History became the gold standard for scholars in the nineteenth century. Fueled by Napoleonic expansion in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean the study of "Antiquities" formed the culture of the time as ancient artifacts and text were studied and fitted together like the pieces of a great puzzle, which they hoped would explain the present. Unfortunately the naïveté of it all became evident as philosophy raised questions of interpretation, as people like Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche scratched at the presuppositions of economics, the ego, and the structures of power. The teller of the tale of history now, was no longer seen as a pure lens into the past, but rather a very faulty interpreter, smudging history with his or her dirty little hands.

Today, history forms us through a theory of interpretation which is mistrustful of motives. Consequently, the evidence of history is now subjected to ideological criteria. The notion of history as a continuum stretching from creation to the present seems foolish, and salvation history is taken to be absurd. The most that modern historians will attempt with their science might be simple snatches of a past already conditioned by the present and corrected according to existing biases, what is called revisionist history. Black history, Chicano history, Gay & Lesbian history, Feminist history are all profound formative philosophical phenomenon which address what is told by the teller of His(Her)story.

Philosophy's role in the present shaping or mis-shaping of history has been to expose the unexamined presuppositions of the modern mind. The historical period that we speak of as Modernity, which we say runs from the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century to the present, has been the dominant worldview in the West, shaping the West's sense of history. So one can see how our "Scientific Cosmology" has given us a hyper-critical sense of History. In fact this "hyper critique" has turned in on Modernity itself, its presuppositions about history, metaphysics, the classic and the individual knowing subject are being criticized in what is referred to as post-Modernity. The net result of this is that our American culture is in a growing uncertainty about what is right as we see ideology drive the debate. Sounding good and looking good are much more important than being good. Many Catholics are especially caught between the economic prosperity and social acceptance that was won in the sixties, seventies and eighties, and the growing sense of alienation from the Catholic Church's institutions. For some, it was the "history" of those decades, that made so many people into "real" American Catholics. Yet, it was also a sense of "history" that drove Archbishop Lefebvre and the Roman Catholic Church into schism for the first time in five centuries. As a philosophical concept history clearly has shaped culture and continues to shape culture. The question that truth demands is an age old question: "Is this progress or perdition?" With this question we come to our third and final formative quality, that of ultimacy.

## "Ultimacy"

In the world of philosophical inquiry the question of ultimacy continues to be confronted. Here we see how changes, both in cosmology and history, have played a part in challenging notions of ultimacy. No longer may one take for granted that the cosmos and human history are

moving toward some ultimate goal. Just as our Copernican shift to a Modern scientific cosmology forced a rethinking of History as the new Messiah, so too the loss of historical certitude has meant a loss of purpose and direction. This is sadly summed up in the labelling of our young as "Generation X". The variable, multiple, possible and contingent attack the notion of ultimacy, creating a future of fear. It seems that the great American freedom of choice has focused so much on the choosing (bigger, better, newer), that the reality of choice, the conviction and commitment of having chosen, are neglected.

Philosophy presses us into a discussion of ultimacy. It is a vital disputation requiring the wrestling of ideas. Clearly the question of ultimacy can be addressed in various ways, and it is not a new question. Paul asked of ultimacy when he stated that if we have lived with this life only in mind then we, of all creatures, are most to be pitied. It is, as one can see, an extremely formative question and philosophy guarantees that it not be swept under the carpet. Thinkers such as Max Weber or Richard Rorty keep us attentive to questions of "possibility" and "contingency" as explaining our perceived order. We do not need a Utopia, or a Heaven, to go on living and this is why ultimacy is a formative factor in culture. Is our future cast before us by the actions, choices, and decisions that we make, the possibilities we actualize; or does the future come to us as an advent of something planned from the beginning of time?

In a democratic State, elections are times of ultimacy run wild and for the Roman Catholic Church, a conclave shares in such a trans-formative power. Leadership is always a question of ultimacy and in that sense ultimacy may be the most formative element of the three we have covered. Cosmology, History and Ultimacy are ways in which Philosophy opens up the discussion which continues to shape or reshape culture. And yet, these three elements allow the Church a voice in the present cultural conversation. As Reason asks about our worldview, about History and Ultimacy, Faith engages the discussion with concepts of Community, Tradition, and Destiny.

## CONCLUSION: THE CONVERSATION OF CONTEMPLATIVES AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is not the enemy of the contemplative, nor the theologian, nor the Church, but it does demand that the conversation be kept honest. Philosophy asks questions like: "What is this world in which we live?", "How did we get here?," and "Where are we going?" Fair questions, but questions which today have a variety of conflicting answers. The grills of the cloister are no stranger to the assortment of feeble answers, as people come seeking from contemplatives, deeper meaning to their confusion. Perhaps theologians need to be scolded for their flabbiness of thought in not exercising the demands and discipline of Reason which Philosophy requires. People seek to understand faith, and if their questions are met with the thin soup of ideologies, they naturally are drawn to the table of those fed by faith. Not every theologian is a contemplative, but every contemplative is a theologian of sorts. Aquinas knew this, and so do the people who come to us seeking advice, prayers, and counsel. There is a fruitful conversation which needs to take place between the issues of philosophy and faith, between culture formed by secular reason alone, and one guided by revelation.

I began with two premises: (1) the Enormity of Revelation, and (2) the Absoluteness of God. To the contemplative, these are not speculative premises but experiential truths in which our modern scientific world has been unschooled. Community takes in the orphan cosmologies of science. Tradition keeps history alive within that community. And Destiny gives it a sense of ultimate purpose. The formative aspects of philosophy treated in this paper are critical of religion, but they are not the enemy of the religious woman or man acquainted with God's revelation. The contemplative spirit speaks from a knowledge purified in the red hot fire of

reason and revelation. The enclosure ought not to close our minds, but it ought to harvest from the vineyards of secular wisdom, and distill in lives of active contemplation, a sweet nectar for our age.



## NOTES

1. For a readable presentation of the breakdown of the medieval synthesis see David Knowles The Evolution of Medieval Thought (New York: Longman, 1988/1962) pp. 265-306.
2. Aidan Nichols, The Shape of Catholic Theology: An Introduction to Its Sources, Principles, and History (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991) p. 43.
3. Nichols, *ibid.* p. 37.
4. Cf. Donald Gelpi, The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology (New York: Paulist Press, 1994).
5. James was Professor Emeritus of History of Religion at the University of London and wrote Creation and Cosmology: A Historical and Comparative Inquiry (in Studies in the History of Religion, XVI; Leiden, 1969).

MAY, 1996

# MORALITY

I believe the moral climate of the United States almost imperceptibly stalks religious bound to enclosure.

SISTER RUTH BERNARD

We cannot separate what we do from the kind of person we are becoming.

michael demkoditch

Our culture is changing from one in which the word is dominant to one in which the image is dominant.

JOHN CORBETT





# CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON MORALITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON SOCIETY AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE NUN

## THE CURRENT MORAL CLIMATE IN THE U.S.A. AND ITS IMPACT ON MONASTIC LIFE

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### I. Introduction

Today's topic is both challenging and interesting. It surely is one about which we each have definite opinions. As Dominican monastic women we are widely considered to be counter-cultural. Does our vocation enable us to be detached and wise observers of the present day moral climate, or are we cloaked in ignorance about what is going on in the "world"? As Dominicans, as preachers of truth, we have the responsibility of reclaiming lost souls through our prayer. We may detest the evils to which Twentieth century America has given free rein but all the while be filled with love for the sinner and implore God's mercy.

Archbishop Theodore McCarrick of Newark, has written, "One of the most critical weaknesses of our society is that we seem to have lost the understanding of evil. It is all too possible to lose our sense of sin in a world...which seems able to rationalize everything."<sup>1</sup>

According to John F. Kavanaugh, S.J. "The word 'culture' refers to the entire expanse of the ways that a group expresses and embodies its reality. A culture is a cultivation. Humans tend and till themselves through nature into culture. When culture has an independent reality of its own it reciprocates and tends and tills us. We become cultured. Thus, although culture is made by humans, it in a special manner makes — to some extent in its own image."<sup>2</sup>

### II. A Personal Reflection

When I was asked to introduce this topic my first reaction was utter amazement! But then as I gave it a bit of thought, I said to myself, "You are the exactly the right sister to speak on this subject!" My own experience of life in the trenches of our present day moral climate spanned just over forty years. In those years I suffered through the trials of moral evil and finally came to the exhilarating freedom of love and empowerment in a Roman Catholic parish community when I was in my mid-30s. My monastic life began nine and one half years ago.

During my early adult years I was a full fledged member of the vast throng that advocates doing whatever you please as long as you are not aware of hurting anybody. The formative years were spent in a dysfunctional family, although that term only became current years later. I was neither baptized nor given a religious education.

I was taught to know good from bad, right from wrong, but the words clearly were unrelated to the reality of my childhood home life. I grew up unsure of myself and truly without the background to provide a solid base for moral decision making.

Consequently, as a young adult I drifted about rather like a small boat in rough waters that had no mooring. Thousands of young Americans really do not understand why their amoral lifestyle should be brought into question and I was one of them. Moral values survived in me more or less as a hunch rather than an informed belief based upon any religious training. Only after the passage of many years did it dawn upon me that I clearly lacked a solid moral foundation so essential for flourishing in our society. I view my Dominican monastic vocation as that treasure in a field wholly unmerited yet given to me in love.

### III. Do New Vocations Bring the Mores of Our Culture into the Cloister?

Since I entered Our Lady of Grace Monastery, nearly all of our new vocations have been women over the age of thirty-five who hold baccalaureate or advanced college degrees. Many held responsible positions in the work force from ten to twenty years. They come to us gifted by God in numerous and varied ways that both enrich and enliven our community. They also bring attitudes and ways of dealing with interpersonal relations that need to be informed and reformed through the day by day living of the common life. They do not shake off all the dust of the culture from which they come just outside our enclosure doors.

Because these candidates are 20th century American women they tend to be individualists, sure of themselves, possessed of strong opinions as well as a veritable font of questions. Although they anticipate that monastic life will be demanding; for most the adjustment is long, slow and difficult in ways they could not have foreseen.

They have experienced the aridity of a culture of consumerism that places supreme value on material things and youth, both so transitory. Clearly, the secular society of today devalues the innate goodness of the human person. Lavish advertising schemes convey the message that a woman's worth is to be measured by her physical appearance, where she vacations, or how much she earns. Each woman bears the Imago Dei imprinted on her soul, but she will never read about that in the newspapers, hear it discussed on the talk shows, nor will it be a point of interest at singles bars.

Most newcomers are strongly independent. Our culture encourages us to look out for Number One. It is widely recognized that people no longer choose to group together unless through the agency of a therapeutic support group.

We thank God that some women do hear God's call in spite of the din out there. They come to the monastery seeking many things: an environment where Jesus Christ

is worshiped and His Gospel proclaimed in lives of prayer totally consecrated to God. They want community, shared values, and structure. Our postulants have high standards and ideals. They expect us to be exemplary religious. They found the moral climate in our nation disappointing, shallow and even repugnant.

When she enters the monastery each postulant has firmly resolved that Christ must be the center of her life. Through her graced call to prayer, penance and study in a Dominican monastery she desires to extend the mercy of Christ to all those who hunger after they know not what.

The culture from which we draw vocations is one in which the popular vote affirms that abortion on demand is a right that women expect, where marriage vows are taken by fewer and fewer couples and then honored only as long as the arrangement proves convenient, where children are introduced to violence and sexual behavior through the media at a tender age, where only the poor seem to be penalized for breaking the law, where drug trafficking and sexual exploitation are hugely profitable businesses, and where it seems OK to end human life when it becomes bothersome because of illness or advancing age. Even our fertile and beautiful land is being raped to produce ever more materials to satisfy our voracious consumption rate.

People's lives have radically changed in the last forty years due to the mind boggling advances in the communications media. Postulants have been accustomed to the daily companionship of the television from their infancy. A stunning array of programming is available 24 hours a day in most American homes by simply pressing a remote control pad. Does this easy way of wiling away the hours with effortless entertainment rob Americans of brain power? Have we lost the ability to concentrate? In the opinion of author Neil Postman, television has reduced the average American's ability to think clearly because a barrage of information is continuously provided.<sup>3</sup>

Our postulants and novices are expected to apply themselves regularly, and quietly to the study of Scripture and theology. For many newcomers such individual pondering over a text is hard work indeed! Yet our very identity as Dominicans is firmly based on the reading, meditation and proclamation of the Word of God. Father Damian Byrne wrote that our vocation "demands of every Dominican the ability to be able to do serious reading as our main route to God but also as our principal asceticism."<sup>4</sup>

Adjustment to the monastic horarium can be painfully hard even for those totally convicted that they have a vocation. One of our sisters wrote in a recent issue of Dominican Monastic Search, that a postulant genuinely experiences "culture shock" upon entering the monastery.<sup>5</sup> The change can be overwhelming!

Monastic silence can be a tough hurdle to someone acclimated to a world that encourages people to talk about it, air your thoughts, vent your feelings! Learning that the hot air from all our verbiage produces no personal growth and can actually disrupt the common good takes time.



#### IV. Has The Culture Invaded Our Monasteries?

Do you think that new vocations are the predominate means by which the fresh air or maybe the polluted breeze of the "world" enters our houses? I don't think so, as I believe the moral climate of the United States almost imperceptibly stalks religious bound to enclosure.

The attitudes and ways of the world subtly work on us and they do change us. How do they gain entry? Sisters meet and interact with secular culture by means of trips, albeit necessary ones, out into the world, through telephone conversations, correspondence, or parlor visits. Additionally, our monasteries are vulnerable to the inroads of the mass media into our cells, community rooms, and monastery libraries in the form of books, periodicals, newspapers, radio, television, computers, tapes, cds, and videos.

I surely do not want to imply that all of this is bad and therefore out of place but our use of the media should be regularly considered. We can be lulled into expecting and demanding information that in no way feeds us as contemplative nuns.

Possessing an awareness of the problems that plague society so as to preach and teach effectively has always been of prime importance to Dominicans friars. Because we support the preaching of our brethren through our prayers we must not stop our ears nor close our eyes to the moral evils of our age.

#### V. Conclusion: What Gift Can We Give to The Culture of Today?

The United States today is basically liberal which means that it looks upon laws as a necessary evil, is anti-institutional and thoroughly antinomian.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Dominican monastic women continue to publicly profess Solemn Vows until death in a stable form of life. Our monasteries look to the Rule of St. Augustine and LCM to mediate the specific, concrete shape and form of our way of life. We find that by faithfully living regular observance we truly become free women! We do not consider LCM as just a handbook of instructions for living the monastic life. Rather, we see our faithful adherence to our constitutions as our very way of life, a Regula. Dominican preachers, teachers and cloisters have been called to witness for nearly 800 years. May we continue to do so! If we manage to live in harmony, and we usually do, it is because our lives are given over totally to Christ. ✠



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Newark, NJ from a pastoral letter, "Pardon and Peace", Lent, 1996.

<sup>2</sup>John F. Kavanaugh, S.J. Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY., 1981. p. 56.

<sup>3</sup>Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, Penguin Books, New York, 1986.

<sup>4</sup>Damian Byrne, O.P., "Letter to the Nuns of the Order", May, 1992.

<sup>5</sup>Sr. Judith Miryam, O.P. (Summit), "Culture Shock - Reflection on the Dynamics of Inculturation and Formation", Dominican Monastic Search, Vol 13, Fall/Winter 1994.

<sup>6</sup>Francis M. Mannion, "Monasticism and Modern Culture: III. The Labor of Tradition -- Monasticism as a Cultural System", American Benedictine Review, 9/93, p. 301.





# CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON MORALITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON SOCIETY AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE NUN

Fr. Michael Demkovich, O.P.  
Province of St. Albert

*(Editor's note: Father Demkovich graciously consented to give this presentation to the Assembly in lieu of Fr. John Corbett, O.P. who was at the last minute unable to attend due to the sudden illness of his mother. Since under the circumstances Father spoke from only an outline, we publish the talk here as transcribed from the tape and reviewed by Father.)*

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I need to say a word of thanks to Sister Ruth Bernard, whose paper we just heard. It presents us with very profound questions about realities in our life. I publicly want to express my gratitude to Sister for the kind of serious engagement of the theme. To follow this, to move in these footsteps, is a challenge.

Let us begin by asking the intercession of Dominic, under the patronage of Herald of Grace, that we be people who proclaim the grace of God in our world and in our midst.

I had an opportunity to go over Sister's paper yesterday, and you all know the circumstances of how I came to stand here. Do keep Father Corbett's mother in prayer. I jotted down an outline of seven areas I want to touch upon, really four questions and three comments. I hope that this will generate further discussion for us. Given the circumstance, my resource has been limited to what I recall of my studies in Louvain. I would have to acknowledge that, in terms of current authors, I stand shy of what one would expect. I am open to changing my position on further study. Nevertheless, I believe this is sound theology.

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First, let's begin with the question "WHAT IS MORALITY"? In understanding the question I would like to identify two elements. One is the ethics that is involved, and by that I mean the person's actions: what I do, or what an individual does. I would like to add to that another element: morality is not only an *ethics* — it is also an *ethos*. By *ethos* I mean society's *transactions*. If by *ethics* I mean a person's actions, by *ethos* I mean society's acting across one another — transactions — the engagement of one another.

What is morality? Well, we all know that there are *good* mores, and there are *bad* mores. So the question of morality is to identify the good mores both in terms of an ethics and of an ethos: both in the individual and in the climate or atmosphere of the society, be that society the state, the neighborhood, the cloister, the community. By and large when we talk about morality we as human beings are striving for the good mores. But we can acknowledge and critically look at the bad mores that are out there. So, to sum up point one, what is morality? It is both ethics and ethos, which strive to obtain the good mores.

The second question that I want to ask is, "OK, WHY NOT BE IMMORAL?". And as I gave thought to this several things surfaced for me, and I hope that it rings true with you. Some reasons why I am *not* immoral are: *relationships* — my family and how I was brought up; my friends; the people who have crossed the paths of my life at key points; the way in which we belong to a particular tribe or clan or grouping. All of these relationships dictate to us in some way a call to be moral. They are our relatedness. And to violate that relatedness raises for us the problem of why there are any morals at all. So you can have people who illustrate the saying, "there is even honor among thieves." Their relationship determines the kind of moral relatedness that prevails. Why not be immoral? Well, relationships put a guard on being moral. Another factor is *fear of retribution*. At one time or another all of us growing up, or even into adulthood, have been moral because of this one thought, "I might get caught!" So fear of retribution is another reason why we do not act in an immoral way.

Another point that I'd like to raise here is the fact of future neediness. It stems from the relationship and it involves the sense that somewhere down the road, if I do behave in an immoral way, the very people that I *need* for help won't be there — a kind of alienation that occurs. And so in one way I choose to be moral because of self-interest. It's prudent to behave with other people, both in my ethics and in my ethos, in a moral, positive, good way. So, why not be immoral? Those three elements are the *via negativa*, the reasons that restrain us from acting immorally.

My third question is: "WHY BE MORAL?". And for this I want to give the positive religious tradition. We are moral because it is a participation in the good. And we understand that good to be a universal quality of God — one of the divine attributes. Why be moral? Because we come to recognize in the law of nature, the divine law, and we adhere to that sense of the divine law. Why be moral? Because we have a sense that it brings us ultimately to justification, to the salvation of souls.

My fourth question is: "WHAT IS CULTURE?". Here I have a number of comments. 1) To the sociologist such as Max Weber the social web of complex relations, and institutions, and people, constitute culture. In that sense when we talk about culture, we talk about self *and* society. Realize that you and I live in a number of societies at any one time. There is the society of our particular monastery, there is the society of the larger Conference of cloisters, there is the society of the universal order, there is the society of the Church universal, there is the society of our home towns — so you get

the idea that we live in a number of societies. So it is always a matter of the self and society; they are two parts of the same coin.

2) Let me give this illustration. I remember being told once that there was a "problematic friar" who went from house to house. And wherever he was he observed how these brethren were "inadequately" living the life. And it suddenly occurred to him through the "wise" voice of others that the common problem was *himself*. In a way, we each are related to the society; and fit into the societies to which we belong are important factors. We not only contribute to the common good in making the common good, but we are formed and fashioned by the community. I have often noticed the number of people who come to religious life looking for community, but they don't want to do or live the common good. Common life is a struggle — it's *built*. And in that sense, too, the relationship between *self* and *society* are two parts of the same coin.

3) Again, what is culture? Not only this vast social web of complex relations and institutions and people, it is also the *language* — our speech, our grammar, our communication. All of these define culture. And a culture *shapes* our language and our ideas. Not only do we belong to different societies, we can rightly speak of the various cultures, the multicultures that we experience. The language that is used and defined by life in the cloister is very different from the language that is used and defined by life in the *barrios*. The language that is used in secular society is very different from the language that is used and defined by the culture which is religious in direction. So again, What is culture? The importance of our language and our speech and our communication, and especially its importance to the Order of Preachers, the preachers, the namers. Our task is to help *name* grace, to be heralds of that grace. And in that sense, we contribute to the naming and the language that shapes our own culture.

4) The fourth point within this question of "What is culture" is the socialization that takes place in culture and by culture. Socialization is how people are brought on board, how they are given a sense of belonging and membership, the way in which we are assimilated into a culture. The very process of postulancy, or novitiate, or simple vows is a process of socialization into our community. Family life is part of socialization. It can be done well and it can be done poorly. Our adult task is to make amends for the poor socializations in our lives and to affirm the positive — that is *redemption*. Redemption recognizes our own sinfulness, both in terms of personal sin and social sin, and transforms us into something of the good.

5) Within this question of culture, I also want to point out that culture places us in the public sphere. When I talk about culture, or when we engage in culture, we are dealing with the *polis*, a public area in which there can be give-and-take and there needs to be give-and-take. It is no longer the world of my own private reflections. But culture is a place of meeting in a very public realm. To be a citizen is to be part of a culture that has a public character, and we can't ignore that public character of religion or of



religious life. So what is culture? A complex social web woven by the threads of society, language, and culture.

My fifth point moves from the questions to comment and it is this: MORALITY AND CULTURE INTERSECT IN OUR ACTIONS. The ethics and ethos as well as the public realm of culture in society come together, intersect, in what we do, *how* we behave, *how* we relate, *how* we live our lives, *how* we bear witness. It isn't a matter of, "oh, it would be *nice* if we did this." We can have all kinds of nice ideals and good intentions. When we confront our actions, we are dealing with *fact*. The very notion of fact is important for it calls us to recognize the significance of the acting, of the doing. We can sit serenely with the best of ideas, but unless we *do* something, our mettle is not tested. And in that sense the significance of our actions is that they are constitutive of the self. This is the essence of virtues.

All of us know when we have confronted and encountered our false self in deeds and actions that we've done. Theologically we call this sin. I have acted in a way that has made me aware that this action is not my truest self, is not constituting and calling forth the best self of who I am. And in that sense any time we act, whether it is good or ill, it is a confrontation. The fact confronts us with a sense of ourself, not only in the individual but the actions of society as well. So, actions in society also place before us this sense of fact. I think it's very important, and I'm drawing on the thought of Maurice Blondel, whose major work L'Action bears a sense of how our thought and our action are related to each other.

But please keep in mind the facticity of our actions. Remember yesterday when I said of modern society that, "it's much more important to look good and sound good rather than being good?" How easy that is. Notice how in our society we come up with the best of rationalizations for our bad actions. Our actions need to confront us, and in that facticity of action we are aware of both guilt and glory. Our actions make us aware.

What is it then — in terms of our actions as Christians — this sense of a moral life? Here I'm going to draw on Thomas Aquinas' notion of virtue. Thomas is really marvelous in taking the whole Aristotelian notion of causes that move from one point to another and that have an accumulative effect. Thomas can be summarized in his whole notion of a virtue-theory in this simple scholastic axiom: "Plant an act, reap a habit. Plant a habit, reap a virtue. Plant a virtue, reap a destiny." There is a connection between our actions and a kind of *habitus* that we create — the kind of habitual movements of our lives. You can see this in people as they are socialized into religious life, or into the military or into any kind of organization — that their actions need to be retaught. And in time those newly learned actions create a habit of life. And that habitual awareness, that kind of ethos which is present in a *habitus*.

*Habitus* is a home, it's a kind of dwelling place, and in that sense it is a moral ethos, an environment for moral living. The way we develop good habits brings to us a sense of the truest person. Consequently, we cannot separate what we do from the kind of

person we are becoming. Every action we do has an impact on the very constituency, as I said, the self-constituency, of who we are as individuals, and who we are as a society. So in that sense to be a virtuous society is always to keep an eye on what our actions are calling us to be, and the kind of *habitus* or home that we create for one another.

One of the difficulties, I think, with American life is that we have so focused on the individual rights and liberties in a privatized notion of society. Society exists to preserve the individual freedoms; we fail to recognize the obligation of government and of law to promote a just society — a society that has the *habitus*, the virtues of goodness, of "life, of liberty, the pursuit of happiness," as the founding fathers described it. So within Thomas' sense of virtue, we need to recognize that our actions lead to habits, habits to virtues, and virtues to ultimate destiny, to God the ultimate goal.

Thomas is a very wise fellow. Because you and I know that we do not have clear say over all of our actions and activities. And so there is a distinction that Thomas draws between human acts and what he calls "acts of man": *actus humanus* and *actus hominis*. Human acts are those actions which the person knowingly, genuinely engages in. And they are held accountable for them. Acts of man are actions that a human person may perform that they are not aware of, for which moral accountability can't be given to a person in the same way it would be if there were the deliberate actions of both intellect and will in terms of a human act.

Human acts for Thomas genuinely engage the whole of the person. Acts of man for Thomas are things that are done through human agency that they didn't really intend to do. For example, if I sneeze while I'm standing behind somebody in the lunch line, and in that action hit the arm of the person in front of me who is carrying a tray, causing the tray to fall on the floor and spill the jello, just as a person is walking by who slips on that jello, falls, has a concussion, and ends up in the hospital — that is an act of man, but it is not a human act. And in that sense Thomas is very good in helping us ask, "What is the reality itself with which we are dealing?". So when we talk about the virtues, we speak of what is truest of the person.

My second comment and sixth point. The moral theology with which I am familiar is that of Louis Janssens. His approach to doing theology I think is very valuable, and it offers us a current model for doing morality. To reduce his thought to a simple phrase we might say, "the human person adequately considered." Just as with Thomas there is a sense of what constitutes human acts, Louis Janssens says that moral theology has to look at more than just a one-dimensional understanding of the moral good. We need to take into account this whole vast network of the human aspects and qualities.

One consequence of his approach was, for example, in medical ethics when a person comes into the hospital we may think only in terms of their treatment, and ask the medical-moral questions. But to adequately consider the human person means that

from the moment a person pulls into the driveway of the hospital, we need to be considering the person adequately — how they are treated as a human being. There are so many aspects that need to be considered in weighing the human good.

Here we are going to have a little group participation, to stop and think about what are the various qualities or aspects that go into being human. Let's just put these on the board as you call them out. I want us to see the many aspects and qualities, the network of relationships and realities that we consider significant, important to simply being human.

I'll start off with one that I think for all of us may be very true... *physical* ...the dimension of being human. If we are not bodily, materially existent, we are not here! I would also say that there is a *spiritual* dimension. From the floor: "*emotional — mental — psychological — hereditary — mechanical — historical — self-reflective — relational — ethnic — educational —* How about *professional*: the sense that work has in our life. *Talent — marginal — economic.*"

That is enough to begin to recognize that one of the realities in doing theology is that there are many aspects to what we are as human beings, and if you think of it just as an isolated individual, you are not going to address the systemic realities of family members, of social networks, of institutional networks. You will miss these if you just consider the moral question as "this individual" which we often do: "Oh, that's a *bad* person. Oh, that's a *good* person." We need to take and appreciate the *person*. If we take seriously Vatican II's notion of the dignity of the human person, we need to appreciate what the fullness of that means.

There is also, I would say, within this notion of the person a self-reflective quality or what we might call *conversion*. It isn't that we as human beings are stuck with our lot. There is always the opportunity for change and conversion and metanoia. And these aspects on the board are some of the elements that are there.

To continue on with current morality, we see that when we do morality we are looking at qualities of human personhood. And again I would emphasize, as I mentioned yesterday, the connectedness between the *theological* that Sister Catherine spoke about in terms of *imago Dei* and person, the philosophical in terms of our questioning, and the moral. The qualities of personhood or human nature are what we are examining.

It's also important to recognize in this "human person adequately considered" the *institutions* that nurture, that create an ethos for the human person to find dignity in work. If you are in a workplace where you are constantly demeaned and demoralized, it's very difficult for that human person to come forward. The Church is in the world for the salvation of souls. We know that. And part of what that means is that the *ecclesia*, the gathering, is a place where these souls can come to find life; where the human person can come to life. And so we have to consider the institutions that exist, not only within the Church but in civil government as well, in the light of what is "the human



person." Housing, food, health care, these are all moral questions that touch upon human life. This can be seen in His Holiness' most recent encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.

Another element within this discussion is the effect of original sin. There persists this reality of obstinate sinfulness, a way in which a person can deliberately *choose* to be inhumane. Oh, it doesn't have to be in big things like Auschwitz. Each one of us here has been inhuman to one another in small ways. Those actions, if not checked, can accumulate to the point of dehumanizing a community, a society, a person, even ourselves. The nature of original sin is that it ultimately does much more damage to the doer than to the receiver. As damaging as our sins are to other human beings, the greater damage is done to our own soul. So here we have looked at the nature of the human person, the qualities of human personhood, the institutions that nurture an ethos of genuine personhood, and the effects of original sin.

"*And on the seventh day...*" We now come to my third comment and the seventh and last point. I would briefly like to offer some aids to living the moral life, or to truly acting morally. Some of these you are aware of. You can probably add to the list if you'd like. But these are just to make a start.

- 1) I would say one thing already mentioned is a *regula*, a rule of life, as an aid to living or to truly acting morally. We choose to embrace for ourselves a kind of guide or discipline for life.
- 2) The challenges of good friends who lovingly call forth the good in us even when it is difficult to do so.
- 3) A healthy, well formed conscience and our attention to it.
- 4) The reality of community — the common good — true solidarity.
- 5) The grace of God and our openness to it.

As you see I have only been able to place my questions and comments before you, scratching the surface of a topic that deserves much more attention. Fr. Corbett's talk will bring the richness of a moral theologian, something which this hastily prepared talk lacks. And yet the questions continue. In this asking we name the reality of our truest self. In the asking, the questing, we live moral lives by God's grace. ▷◁

# CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON MORALITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON SOCIETY AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE NUN

## PARTING WITH ILLUSION: THE CHALLENGE OF MONASTIC FORMATION IN AN AGE OF IMMEDIACY

John Corbett, O.P.  
Province of St. Joseph

H. Richard Niebuhr's classic work *Christ and Culture* has given us some basic ways of thinking about the complex relationships which obtain between the Christ and culture. The models are respectively, Christ against Culture; The Christ of Culture; Christ above Culture; Christ and Culture in Paradox; and Christ the Transformer of Culture. Although Niebuhr clearly prefers the last model, he sees value in all of these approaches and he finds the permanent value of the first model instantiated in monastic life.

The Church of Christ is likewise situated in various relationships with its surrounding culture and these various relationships could perhaps be modeled in the same pattern.

The Church at large may be at liberty in a particular age to emphasize one among the multiple models of itself and its relationship with the surrounding culture which Scripture and tradition provides for its self understanding and self presentation. On the other hand, the model the Church emphasizes may be to some extent dictated by the characteristics of the age in which it lives. The Church in a persecuting age is *bound* in some sense to become countercultural.

Monastic life is a type of the Church and it could be argued that the earliest instances of monastic life were most representative of the Christ Against Culture model. Therefore monastic life, which in a sense instantiates the apocalyptic (and therefore countercultural) dimensions of the gospel is bound to especially emphasize this side of its life in a time and climate which is hostile.

Ours is not a persecuting age. It is true that public christian witness is often marginalized. Emphatic christian witness can in our culture be openly and safely ridiculed. Still, marginalization is not persecution. Feelings of marginalization may simply reflect wounded vanity and be the fruit of a fundamental failure to attend to "the signs of the times".



Nevertheless, our culture is hostile to the gospel. I am not here speaking about the culture insofar as it recommends and approves and reinforces specific behaviors and patterns of life which are incompatible with friendship with God. I am speaking about the culture more generally as a system of communication. This system of communication is such that it of its nature favors the communication of messages in forms which undermine what the Church hopes to establish. In brief, I want to argue that the modes of communication and conversation which are most typical of our culture and which in turn are formative of our culture (the media) constitute a fundamental and formidable obstacle to the fruitful reception of the message of the gospel.

This paper is largely (specific applications to monastic life excepted) a summation of ideas found in Neil Postman's insightful and alarming book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He makes three major suggestions. The first is that a society can often be best understood by attending to its favored media of communication. If Marshall McLuhan made the claim in the 1960's that "the medium is the message", Postman argues that the medium is the metaphor.<sup>1</sup> He argues that the favored forms of communication existent in any given society will themselves function invisibly in delimiting what can and cannot be significantly attended to. The form of the message can determine the meaning of a message.

The second suggestion that Postman makes is that television functions as the unifying force of our own particular culture. Now television is not content neutral. Like any other specific medium of communication it favors a particular way of knowing and encourages certain ways of interpreting reality. There is an implicit interpretation of reality made in every medium of communication and television contains its own inbuilt assumptions about what is important and real.

The third suggestion that I, reflecting on Postman's work, want to make is that the cultural assumptions generated by television *as a form of communication rather than by the actual content of any particular show* are, by and large, hostile to the gospel. This third suggestion has two implications. The first is that monastic life will, by its own favored forms of communication, work to counter the vision of reality generated by the medium of television and will in fact serve as intellectual and spiritual detoxification to a generation of monastic aspirants raised on television's assumptions. The second implication is surely that monastic life requires for the sake of its own integrity critical (and minimal) usage of technologies which by their forms and not just their specific contents undermine the prophetic and inspired interpretation of reality given to the Church in general and surely entrusted to the charism of monastic life in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Penguin Press) pp. 3-15.

The claim that the media by its nature favors and disfavors specific kinds of messages may seem surprising. Surely the media can be used to carry messages which are good as well as bad, true as well as false. TV can carry the Pope as well as Soap Operas. The world of the media is surely a field full of wheat as well as weeds.

It seems at first glance that the media would be content neutral. Yet a moment's reflection shows us that the medium of communication communicates its own form to the message. And therefore it limits what can be communicated. It also, by functioning as a metaphor, is suggestive about how all of reality is to be interpreted.

As an example of how a medium can exclude a kind of content consider that Native Americans in the Plains communicated over long distances with the aid of smoke signals. We do not know what they said to each other but we can be fairly sure they did not conduct philosophical arguments. Smoke signals are insufficiently complex as a medium to handle the question "why is there something rather than nothing?" So far as I know, the distinction between substance and accidents never came up either. You cannot do philosophy with smoke. The form excludes the content.<sup>2</sup>

As an example of how a medium of communication is philosophically suggestive, Postman invites us to consider the clock and the watch. He cites Lewis Mumford's work *Technics and Civilization* in attending to the philosophy of clocks, to clocks as metaphor.<sup>3</sup>

"The clock", Mumford has concluded, "is a piece of power machinery whose 'product' is seconds and minutes." In manufacturing such a product, the clock has the effect of disassociating time from human events and thus nourishes the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences....He shows how, beginning in the fourteenth century, the clock made us into time-keepers, and then time-savers, and now time servers. In the process, we have learned irreverence towards the sun and the seasons, for in a world made up of seconds and minutes, the authority of nature is superseded. Indeed, as Mumford points out, with the invention of the clock, eternity ceased to serve as the measure and focus of human events. And thus, though few would have imagined the connection, the inexorable ticking of the clock may have more to do with the weakening of God's supremacy than all the treatises produced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Postman, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p. 11-12.

If human life unfolds in time and if time is, as is suggested by the medium of clocks, measurable and quantifiable without reference to human significance, if in other words *chronos* rather than *kairos* is determinative of the nature of time, then man is himself measured impersonally and mechanically and is finally assessed as quantity. Are such terrible assertions somehow established as true by the mere existence of clocks. Not at all. This is the sort of suggestion that cannot survive being put into words. But are such terrible thoughts somehow suggested or insinuated by the nature of the medium? That is another matter altogether. As long as clocks were peripheral to the culture, these consequences were not encountered. But when the clock became important to the culture, then the medium became the metaphor, and we became culturally creatures of the clock. (Consider how different watches are from bells. Bells "sing", have a "voice", can summon us, and acknowledge special times for us. A bell can acknowledge "human" time because it does not measure it).

## II

I want to explore television as culturally formative for people of our time. I want to do this by contrasting television as a visual medium with reading as a print medium.

The invention of an alphabet was a revolution in human communication. We think of language as inbuilt in the human species and therefore tend not to think of the alphabet as an invention at all.

But notice that with the invention of the alphabet one can *freeze and then see* one's speech.<sup>5</sup> One can then begin to analyze it in a different way. Teachers have claimed that to learn to write is to learn to think. Subjects are distinguished from predicates. Nouns are distinguished from verbs. Tenses are explicitly differentiated. One learns that parts of speech are not interchangeable.

Aristotle thought that the structure of language reflected the very structure of reality. So to invent the alphabet is to invent grammar. To invent grammar is, in a preliminary sense, to invent logic. And to invent logic is to be already on the way to inventing philosophy.

So to have a culture which communicates largely by way of written language is to have a culture which is disposed to analysis and the uses of abstraction. It is to have a culture in which it is easier to distinguish between the true and the false. It is to have a culture in which the content of our immediate experience can be judged as

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<sup>5</sup> "That the alphabet introduced a new form of conversation between man and man is by now a commonplace among scholars. To be able to see one's utterances rather than only to hear them is no small matter, though our education, once again, has had little to say about this....Philosophy cannot exist without criticism, and writing makes it possible and convenient to subject thought to a continuous and concentrated scrutiny. Writing freezes speech and in so doing gives birth to the grammarian, the logician, the rhetorician, the historian, the scientist — all those who must hold language before them so that they can see what it means, where it errs, and where it is leading." Postman, p. 12.

well as judge. It is to have a culture which is, to a certain extent, freed from the tyranny of the present tense.

Our culture is changing from one in which the word is dominant to one in which the image is dominant.<sup>6</sup> This is to say that, if present trends continue, the dominant forms of communication in our society will be visual rather than verbal.

This entails consequences. Images communicate immediately and intuitively. Images (because they in themselves are received first in simple apprehension rather than in abstraction) do not involve abstraction. Because they do not of themselves involve abstraction they do not, of themselves, involve ideas. Since they do not work on the level of ideas, they cannot be judged as true or as false.<sup>7</sup> They are *experienced* as pleasing or unpleasing. In addition to all of this, images are experienced in the present tense. There is no way to present a picture of something past. An historical drama presented on a stage is one which is experienced as happening now. And so a culture which is increasingly visual rather than verbal in its style of communication will be a culture resistant to truth claims transcending concrete and present experience.

Kenneth Myers in his insightful book *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* claims that pictures cannot of themselves articulate even the simplest distinctions of our language. He asks us to attempt to represent visually these seven simple sentences. (1) The cat is on the mat. (2) The cat is not on the mat. (3) The cat was on the mat. (4) The cat likes to be on the mat. (5) The cat should be on the mat. (6) Get off the mat, cat! (7) If the cat does not get off the mat, I shall kick it. He writes that

Of these sentences, only the first could be presented visually, and only then with some uncertainty. I could show you a picture of a cat on a mat. But you might not even notice the cat. Depending on how interesting the cat was, if I asked you to give me a verbal equivalent of that image, you might say, "A cat", or "a brown cat," or "a pretty brown cat reclining and about to go asleep." The mat might not attract any attention at all. But the verb in the sentence "The cat is on the mat" is also missing from the three imaginary responses. The simplest act of predication, linking a noun to a verb in a direct, unequivocal fashion, is uncertain with images.....The simplest verb in all human language, to be, is the hardest to present visually.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The most popular newspaper in the country, *USA Today*, has been explicitly designed to resemble a television set as much as possible. One can see further confirmation of this trend in the fact that most of the actual research done on computers deals with software designed for visual effects rather than for informational analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Postman, p. 72-73.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* (Crossway Books) p. 163.



I am not disputing that we are creatures who are meant to see. It is not an accident that seeing is often taken as the equivalent to understanding or an accident that light is so often presented as food for the mind. I only mean that the image must be completed and interpreted by the word. And that in our culture this relationship is being reversed and that thus the word is taken as optional accompaniment for the image.

Now television is *tele-vision*. That is its natural bias. It is true, as Postman points out, that one *could* use the medium simply to present lectures or involved complex discussion. In the same way that one *could* use the radio to transmit tap dancing. One could use the medium in such fashion but that usage is not its natural strength.<sup>9</sup> The radio is designed for music and the mysteries of the human voice. It is not designed to communicate the visual wonders of the Cathedral at Chartres. For that you need to be at Chartres yourself. Or you need to see an excellent painting of it in a museum. Or you need to see it on TV.

So TV will always do what it does naturally. It will always be used to communicate visually pleasing images in their millions. Because it is so heavily oriented to the transmission of images, it will not tend to communicate well on the level of ideas.

As a consequence of this, a culture which has television as its principle means of communication with itself will be oriented to visual spectacle rather than to ideas. Indeed, the medium will operate in the culture as a force behind the idea that truth itself is an outdated concept.

Furthermore, a culture which has television as its principle medium of communication will be a culture devoted to entertainment and diversion. You don't have to work at watching TV. It is a passive experience in which you are fed images not offered ideas. The shows are designed to be entertaining.

There is nothing wrong with this. Entertainment and diversion are permanent and legitimate human needs. But the problem arises when the medium becomes the metaphor. Just as the clock as a metaphor for human existence made possible the suggestion that time (and therefore reality) was essentially mechanical and indifferent to human concerns, so the television as a cultural metaphor makes possible the suggestion (which other ages would have found incredible) that all of reality itself is and ought to be *entertaining*.<sup>10</sup> Since television is essentially for the purposes of entertainment, everything that is presented on its screen (including human tragedy) is presented as *entertainment*.

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<sup>9</sup> Postman, p. 85.

<sup>10</sup> Postman, p. 87.



A culture in which TV is the dominant cultural form of expression will have an unspoken sense that reality itself is fragmented, discontinuous, and finally without meaning. Cable television offers you the possibility of switching between, say, 50 channels. You are watching something about Bosnia. The effects of the war are visible and horrific. In the next moment a commercial comes on. It is selling you soap. What does soap have to do with Bosnia? Nothing. Next you switch to the NBA basketball playoffs which are themselves interrupted by a reminder to watch the special this evening on Mother Teresa. The shows have nothing to do with each other. They are continually interrupted by commercials which, in their turn, have nothing to do with each other. Or with anything else. Television as a medium suggests that human experience is fragmentary and finally meaningless. When you can switch your attention so easily from the horrors of war to the wonders of soap, you are left with the impression that it doesn't really make much difference what you focus your attention on. Provided that it is entertaining.

A culture in which television is dominant will be a culture which will provide illusions of intimacy. TV favors dramas which involve personal relations. You can be caught up in them and come to believe that you know *and care about* the principals. (One of the professors at the Josephinum tells me of some of her retired sisters in religion who watch soap operas and who have forgotten that the characters are not real people and who therefore have taken to praying for them). It is a natural mistake. You think, for example, that you know the newscasters (who always present the news as dramatic and entertaining). They will be personalities to you. You will think you know them. If you are enculturated by the world of television, it will come as a surprise that real relationships and real intimacy require lots of work, are frequently disappointing and are most often relentlessly undramatic.

A culture in which television is dominant will be a culture which has a weak sense of place as an essential feature of human experience. We can go anywhere on TV. We can be with anyone, rich or poor. Television breaks the assumption that there is an essential linkage between our physical presence and our experience. We can be everywhere. Now this has a price. For no space is "ours" anymore. When the media can come into our own place and take us anywhere we can imagine, our own places lose their special and irreplaceable character. Our homes become media centers and lose whatever sacramental character they had.

A culture in which television is the medium of all shared experience is a culture with a weak sense of time. We can see on video tapes events which happened long ago. We see then as if they were contemporary and so we lose a sense of the past as past. Moreover, the electronic presentation of past experience can be repeated so often as to be distorting. For example, in the trial of the officers charged with beating Rodney King, the defense counsel was able to turn the prosecution's greatest asset (the actual videotape of the officers brutally and unnecessarily assaulting Mr King) into a liability. The defense played the tape so often and at so many speeds that the actual reality of the beating was lost in the minds of the jurors.

Finally, a culture in which television is dominant will value choice for its own sake. The medium is a business. It can only operate when it sells advertising time for products. These products are in intense competition with each other. There is often no real difference between them so the products produce an image of themselves to encourage consumers to make the correct "choice". The cultural meaning of choice shifts in such a culture from being the power to choose what is truly good to being the arbitrary power to choose one disposable product over another. Finally, our life (or lifestyle) tends in this hermeneutic to be interpreted as a product.

### III

I am aware that excessive TV watching is not the besetting sin of monastics. In that sense this whole presentation could be seen as particularly irrelevant for a monastic audience.

But I think otherwise. For two reasons. First off all, technology is rapidly advancing and even monasteries will have the opportunity to hook up with some rather sophisticated communication systems. I think that our monasteries should think very carefully before introducing them even on a small scale and for a limited purpose. If every medium is also a metaphor and every medium exacts a price as well as bestows a blessing, then one wants to be careful.

Secondly, your candidates for monastic formation will come from a culture dominated by the television. They need not have been television junkies to have absorbed quietly the messages that TV brings in its wake.


Fortunately, the disciplines of monastic life run directly counter to the world of TV. TV teaches that life is essentially about distraction and entertainment. Monastic life is designed to teach something very different. You come to monastic life to escape, yes. But to escape distraction from "the one thing necessary."

TV teaches that human intimacy is easily achieved and is essentially disposable. Your community life teaches the opposite. It is not always easy to live with our brothers and sisters and they are clearly not disposable.

TV teaches us to value the image above all. We are taught by the structures of our life to look beneath and beyond surface images to the divinely implanted *imago dei* so disconcertingly present in every one of our brothers and sisters. The life teaches us to rely on what is essentially invisible and accessible only to faith and not (yet) to sight. Television teaches us that the world is split into fragments which are not ever brought into a unified whole. Monastic life in its structure teaches us to gather the fragments of daily life in a great unity which is the prayer of Christ to His Father in the Spirit.

TV teaches that place and time are all relative to the tastes of the viewer. Monastic life teaches us that the hours of the day are fixed by the wisdom and love of God and that they are to be used in His praise. Monastic life teaches us that our own space is both limited and sacred and that our finite place of enclosure is precisely the place of privileged encounter with God.

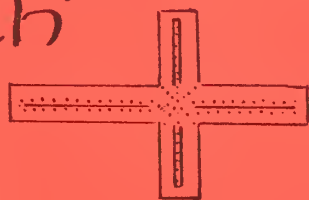
Finally TV teaches that choice is "our" choice provided that choice is choice of the product. Monastic life teaches that choice is not about choosing products at all. It is about being chosen. By God. As a person. As *imago dei* and not as consumer.

You know all of this already. So do your people in formation. At least they know it conceptually. It might take a while before the countercultural rhythms of the life of the cloister teaches them this in other ways as well. 

# Psychology

may, 1996

Consider psychology's conception of the human psyche as a living force, ever craving more life and more love, which ultimately can be found only in God.



SISTER MARY VINCENT

It is at that lonely interface of the spiritual and psychological dimensions of our being that our ... emptiness and receptivity permits transformation to take place, where grace leaps across to fill the void.

Dr. Hallie Moore





# THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN THE LIFE/DEVELOPMENT OF THE NUNS

THE PROS AND CONS OF PSYCHOLOGY IN OUR DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE.

Sr. Mary Vincent, O.P.  
Farmington Hills, MI

*How do we nuns relate to modern psychology  
and what use have we made of it?*

Let me begin by reviewing with you the results of the survey I sent to our Monasteries in November of 1995. Thirteen of sixteen monasteries responded. Twelve of the thirteen monasteries make use of a psychologist or psychiatrist for screening, interviewing and testing. Ten have had lectures or workshops in the area of psychology; seven have used a psychologist or psychiatrist as a consultant or advisor to the Prioress or Council; seven monasteries have found books or tapes in this area useful; and all thirteen monasteries have used or are open to the possibility of individual counseling for sisters by a psychologist or psychiatrist.

It is clear from this generally favorable response that the majority acknowledge psychology as a valid and useful tool. Most of us would agree with Evelyn Underhill's keen observation: "Since the transforming work of the Spirit must be done through man's ordinary psychic machinery and in conformity with the laws which govern it, every such increase in our knowledge of that machinery must serve the interests of religion, and show its teachers the way to success."<sup>1</sup> Psychology is the study of the human person. Using psychology is seeking counsel. This is prudence. Psychology or no-psychology is no longer an issue. The only real questions now bear on discernment, on the limits of psychology and on what are the right and best questions for us nuns to ask of the professionals.

It is clear from the survey that there is among us this process of discernment. I quote from your written responses: "We recognize both the value and limits of this tool." To the question of lectures a few said: "Helpful, informative, broadening." Another: "These (lectures) have been of some, but much more limited, usefulness. The community has become wary after a couple of bad experiences. It seems much better to have lectures in spirituality or retreats, given by someone who knows both the spiritual tradition and modern psychology and can integrate the two." But another comment: "One has to be careful that the psychiatrist or psychologist has a faith perspective as a basis of his philosophy of life." Another representative remark to the question on the use of books or tapes: "Certain individuals devote a lot of time to this. I, personally, am skeptical. 'Self-help' often leads to analyzing others and mistakenly analyzing oneself. It is no substitute for therapy or counselling when there is a real difficulty." To the survey question, that of individual counselling: "This can be very helpful, if a sister goes into it voluntarily and is genuinely open. However, her behavior may not change the way the prioress or others in the community might wish it to change." Another observed: "When it comes to individuals, a sister may feel that she has been helped by counselling, but when we look for evidence in her interaction in community, it seems as if she had never received help. I suppose the success has to be judged both on a personal and a community level." From these observations of yours we can see that we are quite aware of the possibilities of psychology, but we nuns want a religious psychology, a psychology that is a tool, a help, a guide, not an end, and we want good psychologists.

To elaborate on these areas of your concern. Part of our discerning the power and extent of psychology revolves about the fact that psychology can become not only a study of the human psyche, but a total philosophy of life. This is your concern. Robert C. Roberts has said: "Psychotherapies don't merely remove an appendix or prescribe a sedative. They teach a creed; they tell us how to live, how to feel and think about ourselves and others; they proclaim the meaning of life; they shape our characters and our relationships."<sup>2</sup> In other words, psychologists give us a certain wisdom for living, judging, and choosing, a criterion that can help or hinder a life whose beginning and end is God.

But is there not a religious psychology? Can we not be more attentive to the psychological insights our Christian tradition contains? Do not the Scriptures contain a twofold revelation: of who God is and who the human person is? The Hebrew-Christian Scriptures are filled with the stories of named human beings, struggling through human situations, called to come out of bondage into God's marvelous light. These biblical persons are meant to teach us, to take us with them through every possible life-event. Their human make-up is ours. Their failure and success is ours. The writers of Scripture and many Christian teachers have indeed analyzed the human person and invite us to learn from each paradigm. So psychology is not something exclusively new. What seems to be new about some modern psychologies is that they are closed to God, and can tend toward making persons acutely narcissistic, without bonds or relations. In spite of this, there are certain insights and methods of great value to appreciate and use. To give but a few examples: the replacing of faulty, upsetting thoughts with good thoughts, coming from the assumption that emotions depend upon beliefs; another: proper assertiveness and behavior, stemming from the assumption that ultimately, my behavior makes me what I am; another: therapy with the family, based on ontological relatedness, stemming from the assumption that an individual problem comes from improper patterns of interaction between family members.

Here is a second area of your concern. Psychology is an accepted science which offers insights into many areas of distress. It can help us see the causes for our fears, anxiety, depression, aggression, compulsions, addiction. But we know that only God can give the grace to accept these insights, accept responsibility for our actions, and give us strength to think and react differently than before. Scott Peck relates that he never believed in original sin until he began practicing as a psychiatrist. Then he saw that the majority of his patients were afraid to change. They dropped out of treatment. The tendency, Peck observed (and as we well know), is to take the easy way downstream.<sup>3</sup> Human life requires work, and involves suffering. No human science can eliminate all suffering. Psychology is not a cure-all, do-all, or end-all. Your concern is that psychology can tend to be a panacea and the cult of self will replace the search for God. Yet remember the observation of St. Thomas who said that the origin of friendly relations with others lies in our relations to ourselves and that "the good know themselves truly and love themselves truly."<sup>4</sup> My main question here would be: in the basic tension between living and dying, of becoming willing or willful, does not psychology yet help us to understand the causes of our suffering?<sup>5</sup>

A third area of your concern has to do with the fact that not all psychologists ground their approach in a Christian anthropology of the human person. Consider for example, the difference between a psychiatrist who says that it is my organism which forms the self; another who says it is the unconscious which dictates the shape of maturity; and then Gerald May who says "We are created by love, to live in love, for the sake of love . . . we know who we really are. It is the image of God."<sup>6</sup> A Christian psychologist should give a fuller picture of the human person. There are legitimate insights of a psychology that can establish an interim of healing of the natural makeup of the person who is held down by a damaged self-image, or who is seeking a false self, or is driven by false claims. A good psychologist, respecting the dignity and worth of

the person, provides the opportunity for us in the course of treatment to re-examine many of our attitudes and patterns of behavior, and, with grace, we become free to choose a different pathway towards the God who loves us. We are constantly drawn by God and his love. This vision of our destiny, this gift of God's grace gives us the courage and strength to walk through the suffering to the healing of our wounds. All that we are and do is in God's Hands. We are stewards of God's gifts.

And here I come to a basic concern. Some of us have had difficulty in finding a psychologist or psychiatrist who has a faith perspective or uses the method helpful to us. My question in this area: are there any practical tips such as Scott Peck gives, to help us choose wisely a good therapist: is the therapist truly caring, cautious, disciplined; question him\her about their views of important issues for you (religion, women, violence); word of mouth is often the best way to get started and don't hesitate to terminate after the first session.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion I would observe that the tenets of religion are confirmed and affirmed by psychology. Think of the discovery in psychology of the levels of consciousness and how this supports the fact of the necessity for prayer to enter the level behind the immediate one. Think of the discovery of the power of suggestion and how this coalesces with every aspect of our contemplative life which urges us to throw open the deeper mind to transforming influences. What about the danger of keeping skeletons in the cupboards of our souls, the importance of tracking down our true motives, of facing reality, of being candid and fearless in self-knowledge, of sublimating our instincts and desires? All of these are taught by our faith and now by psychology. And finally, consider psychology's conception of the human psyche as a living force, ever craving more life and more love, which ultimately can be found only in God.<sup>8</sup>

As Dominicans we believe in the grace of God, in the transforming power of our monastic, contemplative life, in the capacity of the human person. We are seekers of wisdom, and so we respect the wisdom of psychology. We are walking then, the path of discernment and discretion, to use psychology in the upbuilding of the person to image God more truly and completely — to allow the Holy Spirit to act. Who knows what a person can become, resolving her inner conflicts, finding peace, harmony and joy in God? And going further: just as one cancerous cell can spread its "dis-ease" throughout the human organism, so may one person in vital contact with God's "light-world" pass on to her world the contagion of a transformed life.<sup>9</sup>

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure (1 Jn 3:2-3).      ➤

## NOTES

1. The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) Contemplation and Suggestion, 99-100.

2. Taking the Word to Heart, Self & Other in an Age of Therapies (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 106.

3. The Road Less Traveled (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), Entropy and Original Sin, 271-273. Peck believes original sin is our laziness and a major form that laziness takes is fear.
4. Cf. ST II-II, q. 25, aa. 4 & 7.
5. Gerald G. May, M.D., Will and Spirit (San Francisco: Harper, 1987) chapter 1.
6. The Awakened Heart (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 16&15. "The contemplative way acknowledges that we begin to appreciate love's fullness only as we enter it immediately, directly, and with undefended awareness (24). For a Christic reference in May see 209-210. May is a Christian psychiatrist definitely depending on God and prayer.
7. Op. cit., cf. Afterword, 313-316.
8. Cf. Evelyn Underhill, op. cit.
9. Evelyn Underhill, Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). Cf. her essay, Sources of Power in Human Life, 69.





# THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN THE LIFE/DEVELOPMENT OF THE NUNS

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY AND THEIR INTERFACE WITH THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Dr. Hallie Moore, M.D.

As the evening of our twentieth century draws to a close, and the light of a new millennium is about to dawn, we stand upon a milestone in the passage of time that comes but once in a thousand years. As the people of God living at this extraordinary moment in the course of human history, we have been accorded the uncommon privilege of bearing witness to the passing of the old and the birth of the new, for, indeed, another forty generations will come to pass before the next millennial transition appears. But with privilege comes responsibility, and, while we might pride ourselves on having lived at this time in the history of humankind, we might also do well to reflect upon our progress and our whereabouts, relative to our ultimate goal and destiny.

As members of the family of God, where exactly are we on this pilgrim journey of ours? How have we used the gifts and the energies entrusted to us? What kind of condition are we in as we face the road ahead? And how can the contributions of the field of modern psychology with its understanding of the human psyche and its knowledge of human behavior be of help to us on our journey in return to God?

The field of modern psychology is enjoying great popularity these days, and its contributions are being sought and applied everywhere. This should not come as a surprise, for psychology is among the most fundamental of the human sciences, and its insights and tenets are relevant wherever human nature is to be found. Industry, education, the corporate world, government, religion, and the professions of law and medicine all call upon its contributions and services regularly, as do individuals, couples, families, groups, and institutions of every persuasion.

What exactly is modern psychology, and why is an understanding of what it has to offer felt to be so important to us today? What are its contributions, and equally important, what are its limitations? What are its unique insights relative to an understanding of the human person, and what are its potential dangers? How can modern psychology help us gain a better understanding of ourselves, our neighbor, the world in which we live, the purpose for which we were made, and our ultimate goal and destiny? How sound are the contributions of this field as we see, the truth, and how can we be sure that they are safe?

Modern psychology is the specialized field of study of the human psyche that made its definitive appearance toward the end of the nineteenth century, largely with the work of Sigmund Freud in Vienna. Freud was a physician who specialized in

neurology, the study of the human nervous system, and he was a genius by human standards. He was of Jewish background, but he considered himself an atheist. He lived at the turn of the century in a repressed Viennese culture that was teeming underneath with the spectrum of human passion, and his thinking was influenced by discoveries taking place in the physical sciences during his time.

Freud was a keen observer, and in the course of his work he observed that some of his patients improved or even became well again, their incapacitating symptoms having disappeared entirely, when they were given the opportunity to talk freely and express their feelings openly on matters or conflicts that troubled them deeply. Freud had no explanation for this phenomenon, but he continued his observations, and in time he set forth a fundamental set of concepts relative to the human psyche and his understanding of how it functioned. His theories included the existence of the unconscious; the structural hypothesis of the human psyche with its three components of id, ego, and superego; defense mechanisms; psychosexual development; and the pleasure principle, according to which the instinctual drives of the individual operate in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Using these concepts Freud also developed a specialized treatment technique which he called psychoanalysis. His concepts, along with psychoanalysis, were received with great acclaim in a repressed Victorian Vienna at the turn of the century, and for the next sixty years Freudian theory, along with its interpretations and misinterpretations, dominated thinking in the fields of psychology and psychiatry both in Europe and here in America.

Many followers of Freud were drawn to study with him in Vienna, and one of the most promising students in this group was a Swiss psychiatrist by the name of Carl Gustav Jung. Jung was an independent thinker and an observer in his own right, and he differed with Freud on the conceptualization of the human psyche. His own contributions have had great merit, including the concepts of the individual and collective unconscious; the archetypes; the components of personality designated as the self, the persona, and the shadow; the animus and anima; the introvert/extravert concept, which is the basis for the Meyers-Briggs Test in common use today. Jung also firmly believed in the reality of the spiritual dimension and the importance of religion and religious beliefs for the individual and the culture. This position was not acceptable to Freud, who was influenced by the advances in physics in his day and who saw the human person more in terms of a closed system. On this ground the two parted company, Jung to return to Zürich to begin his own school of thought, that of Analytic Psychology, and Freud to continue his work in Vienna and later in London.

### *Concepts of Modern Psychology*

Let us briefly examine some of the concepts of Freud and modern psychology in order to understand their meaning, their importance, and their relevance to an understanding of the human psyche. It is understood that we are talking about metapsychological constructs, metaphors that are used as descriptive devices in an

effort to understand the intangible and the invisible models they are symbolically presumed to represent. For the sake of accuracy and clarity, we will stay with the technical terms and their intended meaning, for many of these terms have found their way into the common language of our culture, and with frequent and casual use their meanings have become somewhat modified.

The *unconscious*, according to modern psychology and Freudian theory, is that part of our psychological makeup that is outside of our conscious awareness, but whose energies and contents have great influence on our thinking, our emotions, and our behavior. It is both a vast reservoir of instinctual and creative energies, as well as a storehouse for painful memories, unresolved emotional conflicts and traumas, forbidden wishes, and impulses that we might long to fulfill but which are consciously unacceptable to us. The unconscious normally remains out of our awareness, except under certain circumstances. We are in touch with our unconscious through our dreams when we are asleep; we are in contact with the unconscious when we lose contact with reality and become psychotic, and we can access the unconscious through the specialized treatment technique of psychoanalysis.

*Psychoanalysis* is a treatment modality by which troublesome, emotional conflicts felt to reside in the unconscious are brought into conscious awareness by free association and the analysis of dreams, and phenomena known as resistance and transference. Free association is a method by which a person is encouraged to say whatever comes to mind, without judgment, censorship, or concern for its making sense and without any interactive response on the part of the analyst. Resistance is resistance, and in this context it refers to the efforts of the unconscious to keep the underlying conflicts from coming to light, for they are frequently related to early and unresolved emotional trauma and often carry with them intensely painful feelings of shame, guilt, fear, and rage. Transference refers to the unconscious displacement or transfer of the feelings associated with the conflict or trauma onto another person (in the treatment setting this is the analyst), so that the trauma or conflict can again be experienced, worked through, and resolved. Careful consideration should be given to embarking on a course of psychoanalysis, for it is a strenuous venture and involves very hard work on the part of both the patient and the analyst over a long period of time.

According to Freudian theory, the *id*, the *ego*, and the *superego* represent the three components of the structural hypothesis of the human psyche. The *id* is the representation of the powerful instincts of our biological nature, the sexual and the aggressive instincts, which operate by the pleasure principle, demanding immediate gratification and satisfaction. These instincts have been given to us for the purpose of procreation and for the survival of both the individual and the race. As the raw energies of the sexual and aggressive instincts are felt to be much too powerful and disruptive to be contained and maintained in conscious awareness in the *ego*, they are conceptually relegated to the depths of the unconscious, as though to the depths of the sea. Their energies and derivatives are always available to influence our conscious



awareness, however, and it is usually the work of a lifetime to befriend them, to tame them, and to refine them.

The *ego* in modern psychology is the "I," the sense of self that is the center of conscious awareness in the psyche. It interfaces with the unconscious in an area referred to as the subconscious. For the most part, however, it maintains a protective barrier between itself and the unconscious by a set of defense mechanisms which operate largely out of our conscious awareness. The cornerstone of normal, interior psychological defense structure is a defense mechanism called repression which keeps a firm lid on the unconscious and its contents so that its energies are manageable. Other defense mechanisms, such as denial, projection, displacement, suppression, rationalization, intellectualization, and sublimation are considered secondary defense mechanisms that reinforce the primary work of repression. Defense mechanisms are not about being defensive. The defense mechanisms of the ego are normal, unconscious, psychological mechanisms which are absolutely essential to us, for they have a protective function for both the psyche and the individual, and we cannot live without them any more than a tree is able to live without its bark.

The intellectual functions of the ego are numerous, and they include reality testing, cognitive and numerical processing, logical and abstract thinking, evaluation of perceptions of external reality, problem solving, memory, and volition. The ego coordinates and acts as an intermediary between the id and the superego, between internal and external reality, and between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of our being.

The *superego* is that area of the psyche that is concerned with moral and ethical issues and conduct. It is often regarded as an internal regulatory code which functions as a conscience in alerting us with a sense of right or wrong in a given situation. It can be lax, balanced, or harsh and punitive, generating intense feelings of guilt over what it perceives to be the slightest transgression or failure.

While the id drives operate blindly according to the pleasure principle in the depths of the unconscious, the ego matures gradually through countless experiences of frustration that prepare it to operate according to the reality principle. The ability of the ego to tolerate frustration and postpone gratification gives it a freedom to seek, to reflect, and to choose among alternative possibilities in a given situation, whether it be plans for the day, a major life decision, the approach to a difficult situation, the response to suffering, or the decision to let go of a certain attitude or pattern of behavior, risking the uncertainty of what will take its place.

The Freudian theories of *infantile sexuality and psychosexual development* have been known to elicit commotion and controversy, and understandably so, for they are very often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Briefly, they refer to the passage of the infant or the very young child through a series of stages where there is preoccupation and intense pleasure associated with a certain part of the body. These stages are



referred to as the oral, the anal, and the genital stages, and the parts of the body are referred to as the erogenous or pleasure giving zones. For the newborn infant, the mouth quickly becomes an erogenous zone. It is the pleasure associated with the area of the mouth that draws the newborn to be fed, otherwise the infant would starve and not survive. It also brings the infant into the arms of the mother where holding, touching, and eye contact become the foundation for relational bonding. Within the first year and a half of life the intensity of the oral pleasure begins to recede. The body musculature has now developed to the stage that permits ambulation and autonomy, and a new erogenous zone emerges, this time in the anal area. A time of preoccupation with this area of the body is necessary so that the toddler can learn sphincter control, in order to become more self reliant. In reality, the child begins to learn about control in general, and how his "yes" or "no" has the power to please, or to displease and frustrate others. The third stage of psychosexual development is the genital stage, and here the pleasurable or erogenous zone is in the genital area. The child is several years old now and is very curious about everything in general. Genital explorations on the part of a child this age are a normal part of development, necessary to develop a sense of gender and difference, and they must not be endowed with the same implications that attend adult sexual experience. One of the greatest dangers in an understanding of psychosexual development is to confuse the erogenous, the sensual, the pleasurable, with the sexual in terms of adult sexuality. From their it is an easy misstep to interpret any and all pleasurable experiences in the light of the sexual, and this has happened repeatedly with unfortunate and harmful consequences. In following the developmental sequence of the erogenous zones, we see that they are beautifully and purposefully designed to lead the newborn progressively from the total helplessness of infancy into the relative autonomy of childhood.

It is of the utmost importance to understand that what is known and referred to today as modern psychology does not in itself define the field of psychology any more than a branch defines the tree. Modern psychology has had a major impact on our culture during the greater part of this century, and its interpretations and misinterpretations have been liberally, but often inappropriately, applied across all spheres of human behavior. This has resulted in the conceptual tendency to strip the human person of the faith dimension in his life and in his being and to reduce him to a definition in psychological terms. This is not the proper use of modern psychology, and it is certainly not the stance of the broader field of psychology. It has been the misguided, reductionistic, and often arrogant approach on the part of some in their use of modern psychology that has led many to feel uncomfortable, wary, and distrustful of the field of psychology as a whole.

Human nature can be vulnerable to growing acclaim, and Freud himself was no exception in this regard. Aware of the impact of his ideas on a growing number of intellectual circles, he began to interpret much of life through the lens of his own theories and concepts. In so doing he had the misfortune one day of making the statement that religion was the neurosis of mankind. This was very threatening and highly offensive to the Church in Roman Catholic Austria, and the Church volleyed

back with the equally unfortunate statement that psychiatry was the work of the devil. Thus began a very deep and painful split between psychology/psychiatry and religion, one that came to be filled with years of distrust and animosity, and one that has taken most of the decades of this century to heal.

As so often happens when things go to an extreme, whether it be a repressed culture or a deep misunderstanding, they begin to correct by going first to the other extreme, and for a time modern psychology was hailed as a panacea by those fascinated by what they perceived as the power of its insights and its claims. Today contemporary psychology seems to have a more realistic and balanced perspective and has integrated the significant contributions of modern psychology with the work of many others, particularly that of Jung and Erik Erikson, into a broader, more holistic understanding of the human person. The field of psychology actually has a very human face, one that we can all relate to, and before we proceed with Erikson's stages of the life cycle, it might be worthwhile to take a few moments to see how it all began.

### *The Roots of Human Psychology*

The field of psychology has very old roots, as old as humankind. Throughout the course of the centuries and the millennia, the human person has been impelled by the deepest need within his individual and collective being to seek and to find the answers to simply, but compelling questions about himself, the world in which he lives, his purpose in life, and his destiny. And man has always been especially curious about man, and why he becomes so fascinated, so frustrated, and so frightened by the thinking, the emotions, and the behavior of himself and others.

Life was certainly not easy for our early ancestors who found themselves face to face with the elemental forces of nature and very little in the way of directional reference or support. They must have been flooded with anxiety and felt intensely insecure at times as they struggled daily for food, shelter, and survival. Finding themselves at the mercy of the elements, wild animals, and the extremes of heat and cold in a vast world which they did not understand, they were driven by this very basic form of existential anxiety to gain a sense of control and mastery over their feelings of fear and terror. By instinct and intuition they knew then so clearly and graphically what we know today. We fear not so much what we know; we fear more what we do not know, the unknown, that over which we have no control, but which we perceive as having power over us in ways which may not be to our liking or may actually do us harm.

In their efforts to cope and understand, our early ancestors took the energy from their insecurity and anxiety, and with it they began to observe. They observed that there was an order to things in the natural world. Can and night, the sun and the moon, the seasons, the stars, and the rotation of the heavens around a fixed point were all phenomena that became increasingly familiar, predictable, and reliable. They saw

that cycles were made up of a sequence of stages, that there was a time to sow and a time to reap, a time for growth and a time for rest, and that the heeding and respecting of these inherent laws greatly enhanced productivity and with it their chances of survival. They observed the interplay of rhythms between nature and themselves. The dawn brought light, the day activity, the evening fatigue, the night sleep, and the following morning renewed energies. They observed the behavior of wild animals and how the powerful, instinctual energies of these creatures stirred something deep within themselves, evoking feelings of power, awe, fear, and respect.

Life was a matter of survival during the childhood years of humanity, and our early ancestors dealt with their anxiety by continuing to observe. They observed the behavior of other human beings, how they were very comfortable with some and uncomfortable with others. Some were friendly and cooperative, others were unfriendly and obstructive. Some invited closeness and intimacy, while others needed and created a distance. They saw how some could be demanding, aggressive, and domineering, and bent on the satisfaction of their own needs, while others could be submissive, passive, and aware of the needs of others. Some were sensitive and kind, while others could be very cruel. They observed and experienced how interactions among them could range from peace and harmony to tension, conflict, and frightening discord. And they learned that sooner or later, whenever they gathered together for any length of time, a pecking order would evolve. They began to realize that, for the individual, isolation could be very painful, even punitive, and that going it alone often meant death. Most of all they saw that life in the world was less threatening when they could move together in pursuit of a common goal, and individual anxieties lessened when they were replaced by the strength of the whole.

While life together brought a sense of security and did much to allay individual anxiety, it also became more complex. In banding together in mutual dependency, each member of the group now had to form a relationship with every other member and with the group as a whole. To do so effectively required a new and more sophisticated communication system. What had been primarily a non-verbal communication gave rise to verbal communication, and language was born. Observations of the outside world could now be compared and validated. Ideas and perceptions could be shared and met with agreement, modification, or rejection. An awareness of sequence in the natural world gave rise to logicity in thinking; repetition in external phenomena became a foundation for memory; and an awareness that there was a power immanently involved in creation, but far greater, gave rise to imagination, awe, and wonder as man searched to comprehend and establish his relationship with the Infinite.

Human history has known of those who have had an especially keen awareness of the workings of the human psyche. Often with painful personal honesty, these individuals have known all too well the heights to which the human heart could aspire and the depths to which it could fall. In the course of their search for the Infinite, they sought to understand the forces and tendencies they encountered within themselves and others which seemed to obstruct, impede, complicate, and interfere with the pursuit



of their goal. These forerunners in the field of psychology were the sages and the saints, the early philosophers and the spiritual giants of the Old and the New Testaments. Surely St. Paul had a take on the existence and the influence of the unconscious long before Freud, when, in Chapter Seven of his Letter to the Romans, he shares with us his struggle in trying to understand his failure to do what he wants to do. The Desert Fathers and the Desert Mothers, Augustine, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and numerous others from Plato and Aristotle to William Shakespeare were all making their contributions to an understanding of the nature and the operations of the psychological dimension of the human person long before university departments or specialized programs for the study of psychology were established.

Psychology has always been intimately associated with the spiritual and the philosophic dimensions, so closely at times that it seems the three dimensions intersect and intertwine in ways that they may appear to be virtually one and the same. They are distinctly different, however, and, although they may share a common interface at their boundaries from time to time, their provinces are distinct in their areas of concern and in their inherent principles and laws.

### *The Psyche*

Psychology is the study of the functions of the human psyche and how these operations are manifested in thinking, feeling, and behavior in relation to oneself, to others, to the family, community and social environment in which one lives, and to God. Although the human psyche cannot be seen or located anatomically, as is possible with a given area or part of the human body, the reality of its presence is clearly recognized by how we think, how we feel, and how we act. Conceptually, the human psyche is felt to reside at the interface between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of our being. From there its province extends down to the very depths of the primitive instincts and energies of our biological nature, and it reaches up into the sophisticated processes of conscious awareness, cognition, volition and contemplation. It is an exquisitely crafted and highly complex interior informational processing system whose silent, transparent, and seamless operations take place mostly without our conscious awareness. It works hand in hand with our five special senses — sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell — which provide ongoing and up to the moment information from the world of external reality. The psyche oversees and mediates the moment to moment interplay of the countless internal processes — instinctual, biological, emotional, cognitive, rational, and volitional — which take place within us. The task of the human psyche is both formidable and sublime, for from its unique perspective at the interface of the physical and the spiritual dimensions of our being, it simultaneously integrates all of the dynamic processes of our internal milieu with our perceptions of the outside world in a way that enables us to function with relative stability in the pursuit of our goals amidst the stresses inherent in everyday life.



The psyche is an inherent and integral part of our nature, and it has been designed in the service of our survival, to guide us at all levels, to warn us of danger, and to illumine our path as we journey toward our destiny. So far we have referred to the functions of the psyche in an ideal, almost rarified state. In reality it is subject to and buffeted by the same stresses imposed by the host of potential vicissitudes that sooner or later in one form or another will be actualized in the life of every human being in this imperfect world. Genetic factors, constitutional endowment, social advantage or disadvantage, individual or collective traumas at any age, and natural disasters are only a few of the high profile stresses of ordinary life. The psyche functions in ways that enable us to adjust, to reestablish, and to maintain a remarkable sense of balance through a myriad of stressful circumstances. However, it, too, labors suffers wear and tear, shows signs of fatigue, irritability, and disturbance, becomes overwhelmed, and, at an extreme, breaks down. Signs of duress range from commonplace anxiety and depression that simply come and go, to overt psychosis, and from transitory adjustments in the course of a day to those major aberrations in thinking, feeling, and behavior that compromise to varying degrees the ability of the individual to function.

In its analysis of the symptoms of psychological duress and dysfunction, modern psychology has made significant and lasting contributions to an understanding and appreciation of the vast territory and operations of the human psyche. Keeping in mind the limitations and the tendency on the part of some to define all spheres of reality according to its terms, modern psychology and Freudian theory have an integral place in the understanding of the human person. There were those who studied with Freud who saw the potential in taking his ideas further into a more open system, and one of these was Erik Erikson, whose stages of the life cycle we will next proceed to examine.

### *ERIK ERIKSON'S STAGES OF THE LIFE CYCLE*

Cycles of time permeate our existence, and their patterns and rhythms form the infrastructure of all created being. The human life cycle is no exception to this fundamental law of nature. Dramatically framed by the definitive moments of birth and death, the life of the human person unfolds through a sequence of stages common to the inner workings of all cycles. Birth and early development, growth and maturation, stabilization and productivity, decline and death giving rise to a new cycle, a new generation, characterize the invariant progression of the interior life of a cycle between two designated points in time. Cycles are about many things and many reasons, and yet, independent of their respective variation or purpose, they all represent a masterful integration of the circular, the linear, and the constant.

The life cycle of the human person has been the subject of great interest for many decades now, due in considerable part to the influence of the work of Erik Erikson, whose theories on identity and the stages of the life cycle began to give a new focus to modern psychology. Erikson was born in Germany of Danish parents in 1902. His father abandoned his mother before she gave birth. While he was well cared for by his

mother and his adoptive stepfather, he was not told of his true parentage until he was well into adolescence, a time when he was already experiencing great confusion and turmoil about his identity. A member of the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society during the time of Freud, Erikson left Vienna with the rise of Fascism in the mid-thirties and immigrated to the United States. He settled in Boston, where he was well received, and where he continued his work and teaching with a special interest in the normal psychological development of the child. Influenced by the work in sociology and anthropology at that time, Erikson recognized the importance of relationships and the social milieu and their role and influence on the progressive maturation of the human person throughout course of a lifetime.

Elaborating on the basic stages of a cycle, Erikson postulated eight stages for the human life cycle. To each stage he ascribed an age-appropriate developmental task that had to be mastered, a skill that had to be acquired, in order for the individual to move on successfully to the next stage. He introduced the term epigenesis to refer to this process of ego and social development, in that tasks not adequately mastered at one stage would make the work of subsequent stages more difficult and less successful. Erikson's stages of the life cycle may already be familiar to you, but they will be enumerated here, then each one will be looked at individually in a few moments. The eight stages with their associated ego development tasks are as follows:

- I. Oral-Sensory Stage: Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 yrs.)
- II. Muscular-Anal Stage: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (1-3 yrs.)
- III. Locomotor-Genital Stage: initiative vs. Guilt (3-7 yrs.)
- IV. Stage of Latency: Industry vs. Inferiority (7-12 yrs.)
- V. Stage of Puberty and Adolescence: Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-18 yrs.)
- VI. Stage of Young Adulthood: Intimacy vs. Isolation (18-40 Yrs.)
- VII. Stage of Adulthood: Generativity vs. Stagnation (40-65 yrs.)
- VIII. Stage of Maturity: Ego Integrity vs. Despair (65+ yrs.)

In many ways the early stages of Erikson's conceptualization of the life cycle parallel, overlap, and coincide with the early psychosexual developmental stages of Freud. Erikson, however, in realizing that the maturation process of the human person does not end with having attained adulthood, but continues throughout the life cycle, added further to Freud's stages, incorporating the influence of both significant relationships and the social milieu on human growth and development.

Let us now look at these eight stages of the life cycle with their associated developmental tasks as proposed by Erik Erikson.

## **I. Oral-Sensory Stage: BASIC TRUST vs. MISTRUST**

We enter this world in the throes of the major and multiple traumas of separation and loss. At the moment of birth we are delivered abruptly and irrevocably into a strange new world, in an instant losing all that was previously familiar. For the first time we are not actually physically separate from our mother, that most significant person in our life with whom we had just spend the previous nine months in blissful intrauterine symbiotic dependency. There are some who would say that we spend the rest of our lives trying to recover from the shock of simply having been born and having committed ourselves to live in the world of reality by the taking of our first breath. Prior to that time we were totally carefree, we had no responsibilities, and there were no expectations of us, at least none of which we were aware. We were fed, protected and kept safe, and our every need was met, while at the same time we were considered the most important person in the world by someone who had not even officially met us yet. How do we get from there to here, (and we all seem to have managed), when we begin this life totally helpless and dependent, utterly confused, and overwhelmed by massive anxiety? We do exactly what our ancestors did during the infancy of humanity. We begin to observe.

In the beginning little is expected of us as infants except to eat, sleep, be held, and be changed, yet through these simple interactions involving touch, sight, hearing, taste, and smell comes important information upon which we will begin to build our world. How reliable is that person in taking care of our needs, when our only way of making them known is to cry? If she leaves the room, will she come back? How responsive is she to our levels of frustration and anxiety that periodically become intolerable? How predictable is she in her own reactions, or does she give mixed signals, leaving us apprehensive and confused? And how well do others understand our basic needs for security, acceptance, attention, and approval which we will have for as long as we live? Gradually, as we begin to incorporate our experience of interaction with others, particularly our mother, we develop a predominant feeling of either trust that our needs are going to be satisfied by others and the world about us, or a feeling of distrust that our needs are not going to be met in a reliable way.

## **II. Muscular-Anal Stage: AUTONOMY vs. SHAME AND DOUBT**

By the second year of life we are walking by ourselves, we are learning to talk and have begun to feed ourselves, and we are gaining control of our sphincter muscles. How the significant others in our life respond to these very real accomplishments will influence greatly how we feel about ourselves. If our parents are supportive, encouraging, generous in praise and not overprotective, our self-confidence will grow, and we will begin to develop a healthy self-esteem. If our parents are critical, demanding, and too restraining, we are apt to feel ashamed of our efforts, and we may have difficulty trusting ourselves. At this age we are extremely vulnerable to being shamed and embarrassed, and we may protest with rage in overtly rebellious or



passively stubborn behavior. We have also learned how to use an important little word called, "no," and that it can be very powerful in frustrating our parents when we are angry with them.

### **III. Locomotor-Genital Stage: INITIATIVE vs. GUILT**

We are about five years old now, and we have many friends with whom we like to play. We are ready to go to school, which will take us into the outside world, away from home and away from our mother. We are excited about this, but also very nervous. When the big day arrives, and it is one of the biggest milestones in childhood, some of us begin to cry and refuse to go, unless our mothers come and stay with us. Others of us are too embarrassed to cry, so we try to be brave and not let on how scared we are. Although we do not know it at the time, this anxiety is something that everyone experiences. It is a kind of universal anxiety, and it even has a name. It is called "separation anxiety." Finally the first day of school is over, and we are very pleased with how well we did. After a week most of us look forward to going to school, except for a very few who still insist that their mothers come and stay with them. At this age we can initiate physical and intellectual activity on our own. When we are encouraged in our interests, we begin to feel secure and confident showing initiative. But if we are belittled or ridiculed in our efforts, we may feel very guilty and that makes us anxious about initiating any activity. Also at this time we are developing an intense interest in our parent of the opposite sex, so much so that we think we might even want to marry him or her someday. Freud called this the Oedipus Complex, after a king who married his own mother without realizing it, and we are very serious about it. Somehow we know that it will not be possible, but we are very sensitive about our feelings and how they will be redirected without causing us shame and embarrassment.

### **IV. Stage of Latency: INDUSTRY vs. INFERIORITY**

We are actually enjoying school now, and we are feeling very grown up as we have begun to use the tools of adult learning. We are curious and fascinated by everything, and we are eager to learn and acquire new skills. We are learning that results take effort, and if our efforts are praised and rewarded, we begin to feel increasingly confident in showing how well we can do things. If our efforts are ridiculed or ignored, we may become afraid of failure and may not even want to try, as it can be very painful to feel inferior before others, let alone in our own eyes.

### **V. Stage of Puberty and Adolescence: EGO IDENTITY vs. ROLE CONFUSION**

Adolescence is a time of upheaval in which there is an opportunity to rework the tasks of the previous stages. This is a very turbulent time for us, and we mind being taken care of, for we are no longer children. But neither are we adults, so why should



we have to take responsibility? Besides, our bodies are changing, and that is awkward, exciting, confusing, and frightening, and to understand all this takes a great deal of our time and energy in discussions with our friends. We are struggling to find out who we are. That seems to change from day to day, if not from hour to hour, and the only reassurance we have is that our friends seem to be going through the same thing, at least the ones who will talk about it. We have no idea how we are going to find that identity everyone is supposed to have, that sense of who you are that remains the same through a multitude of situations. But, we are working hard at it. We spend lots of time and energy thinking about our personal heroes and heroines, ideologies, and members of both sexes. There is much that attracts us, and we want to try many things on for size. If it fits, we may keep it for a while, and if we really like it, we might even make it a part of ourselves. Our parents seem to have no idea of what we are going through, but we have found a way to free ourselves from having to do things their way. It is called the peer group. We band together in a kind of subculture with our own language, our own favorite food, our own type of music, and our own manner of dress, none of which our parents can understand anymore than they can understand us at this stage of our lives.

## **VI. Stage of Young Adulthood: INTIMACY vs. ISOLATION**

If we can survive adolescence and emerge into adult life with a sense of who we are, we should be able to involve ourselves with others without losing our sense of personal identity. We should also be able to share ourselves in a committed long-term relationship. In reality, however, this is easier said than done, for intimacy involves vulnerability. It takes a long time to develop the capacity for intimacy, for invariably there are disappointments, hurts, and misunderstandings along the way. Intimacy requires emotional maturity, a sense of balance, and a respect for the boundaries of the other person. For intimacy is not just about closeness, it is also about distance, and the ability and the willingness to allow emotional space when necessary out of respect for the needs of the other. We may have a strong sense of who we are, but if our need for closeness overrides our respect for the boundaries of another, tension and eventually turmoil will ensue in the relationship. If we do not have a basic sense of who we are, we may feel apprehensive when faced with opportunities for intimacy, and instead withdraw into isolation as a way of protecting ourselves.

## **VII. Stage of Adulthood: GENERATIVITY vs. STAGNATION**

Generativity is not confined to just having had children, although this can certainly be an important confirmation of our ability to bring forth new life. Generativity is a very broad concept that also means involving ourselves in interests that contribute to the guiding of the next generation or to the betterment of society. Those without children can be generative, while those with children who are largely absorbed in their own needs and comforts can be engaged in stagnation. The stage of adulthood is the

midday of life when the active energies of morning accomplishment begin to shift to the reflective energies of afternoon and evening. Concerns about mortality set in, as family and friends begin to leave us through illness or accident. Priorities begin to shift, and somehow climbing the mountains of visible accomplishment no longer seems so important. We now have interior mountains to climb, and, if we pause long enough to take a close look, we can see that they are vastly more challenging. This is an especially significant stage for the adult woman, who will experience menopause usually sometime between her late forties and early fifties. This time of normal upheaval can have a clearly recognizable emotional component, as hormonal shifts bring about periods of physiological imbalance that often become manifest in moods, irritability, and a heightened sense of vulnerability. It is also a time when a woman has the opportunity to come to terms with herself and her identity as a woman, apart from her childbearing capacity. This stage of the life cycle is equally significant for the adult man, who will be more focused on his career accomplishments with the realization that the years left until his retirement are now growing fewer in number.

### **VIII. Stage of Maturity: EGO INTEGRATION vs. DESPAIR**

In this last stage of the life cycle, we have the opportunity to look back over the course of our lives with a sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Was our life basically meaningful and productive, giving us a sense of fulfillment and contentment? Or was our life void of real purpose and meaning, giving us a sense of despair? If so, what are we going to do about it now, while we still have the time? It may be more difficult, but it is not impossible. Erikson felt that peace in our later years is truly possible only if we have moved beyond the narcissism of self-preoccupation and are capable of intimacy and generativity. We live in an age that presently seems to foster a sense of personal injustice and that facilitates dwelling on past emotional traumas, abuse, and deprivations, forgetting that we can all be victims, and we can all be victimizers. If we choose to dwell and hold on to past traumas, beyond what is necessary for their resolution, and this may take years, our suffering is going to become sterile. We will not be victimizing ourselves and very likely those around us. Sterile suffering becomes corrosive in time. It makes us very bitter and at risk for acting out our self-contempt on others. If we are carrying around with us a bag of unresolved grievances, injustices, hard feelings, and bitterness, it is very difficult for peace and contentment to make their inroads. If we can address the issues of our discontent, work through them to the extent that it is possible, reach true forgiveness, then let go of our bag of grievances and negativity, and this might be the most difficult thing we have ever done, we begin to open ourselves to the peace and fulfillment that surpass all understanding.

Life would be so simple, if we could just neatly master the stages of the life cycle, one by one. Just think of how well balanced and easy to live with we would be. But life in the world of reality is not like that. These stages of the life cycle and their associated tasks are helpful and important points of reference, and they have their basis in reality. Nonetheless, they are human and arbitrary guidelines. There is no


one who has thoroughly mastered any one of these stages, let alone all in sequence, nor is that even what is asked of us. Instead, we slip and slide, up and down, back and forth, and occasionally from side to side on a continuum. If we are fortunate, we progress for the most part in the direction of growth and maturity. If we are honest, we know all too well our times of regression and our periods of stagnation. This is when we want to hide, and often we are successful, even from ourselves, for this is when we are most vulnerable. But this is also when we are most real, for this is when we come face to face with our true potential.

### *The Doorstep of the Spiritual*

It is when we are most insecure and vulnerable that we stand on that barren and lonely interface between the spiritual and the psychological dimensions of our being, often without our even knowing it. Psychology can help us see where we are, how we got there, and why we are stuck. It can help us see where we are blocked, and what it is that we are holding on to that is sapping our energies and interfering with our having life and living it more abundantly. Psychology can bring us to the doorstep of the spiritual dimension, but it cannot take us across the threshold to the other side. We meet the spiritual at the boundary of the psychological, the boundary of the human, where, as Gertrud von le Fort once said, "God comes rushing in." That presumes we have accepted ourselves just as we are. Seventy years old and still having problems with basic trust? Fifty years old and still having problems with a sense of personal identity? In our psychologically oriented culture we are apt to judge ourselves as deficient or defective in some way, for that is how the culture would judge us. Not to worry, for that is not the judgment of the spiritual dimension. Psychological insight may be of help, but only if we can meet ourselves, accept ourselves, and truly love ourselves exactly where we are and the way we are, as human beings having problems with trust at age seventy and uncertainty about our identity at age fifty. It is at that lonely interface of the spiritual and psychological dimensions of our being that our interior posture of emptiness and receptivity permits the chemistry of transformation to take place, where grace leaps across to fill the void, bringing with it the power that is made perfect in infirmity. Catherine of Siena summarized it so well in her observation made centuries ago, that "the cell of self-knowledge is the stall where the human soul must be reborn."

Life and death, union and separation, love and hate, war and peace. These are the universal warp threads against which we weave the tapestry of our individual lives. Each will be uniquely different, a one of a kind, never woven before, and never to be repeated again. We weave with what is given to us, and we must, all of us, become skillful weavers. If the warp threads are too tight, they may either break, or, they may constrict us in ways that adversely affect the weave. If they are too loose, they will not support the developing fabric. It is with the weft, the cross threads, that we have the opportunity to develop the pattern, the colors, and the texture that are uniquely ours. In this we discover our identity, not knowing where we are going when we begin, but

weaving carefully and faithfully day by day with the stuff of life at hand. Finally the time comes with the fabric is ready to come off the loom, the only one of its kind, that facet of the Infinite that has been entrusted to us to show forth. We must be faithful to the pattern within us as we weave, for a German proverb wisely reminds us that most of us die as copies, whereas we were born as originals.

And so, as we stand on this milestone in the passage of time before the dawn of a new millennium, we have before us the vast array of accomplishments and discoveries of humankind to date. All have been subjected in one form or another to the test of time, and perhaps more have disappeared than have remained. Modern psychology and Freudian concepts have had their turn in being shaken by the winds of challenge and outrage, and that is good, for it is a time honored way of separating the wheat from the chaff. But there is the wheat of truth in many of these concepts, and it is important to recognize it and to use it wisely. Modern psychology, when used appropriately and with respect for its limitations, can guide us to that boundary on its interface where we are met by the Eternal. 



# ECONOMY

MAY, 1996

It is not land, possessions, or even posterity, but the intimate relationship that we are made to have with God that must shape all of our lives. This is our "true wealth" as followers of Jesus.

SISTER MARY AMATA

The contemplative should approach the world with discretion... test all things... reflect upon all things.

BONIFACE RAMSEY



# THE EFFECTS OF MODERN ECONOMICS ON OUR WAY OF LIFE

Sr. Mary Amata, O.P.  
Washington, DC

Let me begin our conversation about Economics, by saying that I wrote to friends and relatives, inviting them to offer me any thoughts they might have on the economy, any helpful hints that they have discovered. Some sent me articles from their local newspapers or told me of stories they read, and commented on them. Some suggested ways to save money, to conserve energy, to recycle, etc. Three were kind enough to sit down and really think about the American economy and how it got to be the way it is, and where it may be going. Finally, some offered powerful observations on our economic society and the effects it has on religious life now, and what it may mean in the future.

Helpful hints abound and many of these are already familiar to us: turn off unused lights; watch for leaky faucets and fix them; buy in bulk where possible; recycle; Recycle even diocesan newspapers and other reading material that others may not be able to afford.<sup>1</sup>

New products on the market are also quite helpful. Besides computers, their accessories, microwave ovens, cellular phones, and such things, I learned about some more "ordinary" developments. There are new light bulbs on the market now that use less energy and give better light — some of these are fluorescent, that can be used in "old" incandescent light fixtures. There are also HALOGEN bulbs that make a very bright light for specific work needs, like bookkeeping or hand sewing. These bulbs were formerly distributed as a special service for those men and women with very limited eyesight. Anyone who needs them can now get them through the Sears catalog.<sup>2</sup>

And there are still many of my family and friends who remember the way things were in the Depression — how they all learned to get along with less, to make do with what they had, and to re-use things in every possible way.

Continually watching for, even searching out, honest salesmen and helpful clerks, as well as reasonable prices is another area that receives strong recommendation. Still, many of my correspondents shop more for convenience and price, rather than loyalty to this or that grocery or department store.

There is a strong tendency to "BUY AMERICAN" rather than the "cheaper" foreign articles, that might be manufactured with underpaid labor. By the same token, there is also the question of whether American-made products are currently made with long-lasting quality. Many products now are designed to be used only "temporarily," so that the user will have to be continually replacing them. Thus, the continual redesigning of equipment requires up-grading the entire system.

On the opposing side of the "price or convenience" question, I heard about how large chain stores do not support local charities as the neighborhood merchants used to do. And the profits these stores make usually are not "returned" to the local economy either, but go to the owner of a corporation that can be based anywhere in the country, or even overseas!

While some friends point out that new jobs are created when the chain stores come to town; others have lamented the chain stores driving local merchants out of business. Still others note that the local merchants had replaced door to door salesmen decades ago, and we have forgotten about that, even accepted it as the normal evolution of the economy.

As a self-employed architect put it:

We are in the continued process of creation. Architecture is not sold nor delivered as I was taught [30 years ago] ... I was taught how to use ... drawing boards, ... and pencils. I haven't used a drawing board for three years. ... I now draw on this computer and send an electronic file to the print company on my telephone. ...

Southwestern Bell has purchased architecture from me in Little Rock [AR] for over 20 years. Now they are in the process of establishing a way to purchase architecture through St. Louis from one source that will cover from two to five states. ... I must change to meet the new ... requirements of fellow man as he finds himself with current economy and technology.<sup>3</sup>

One especially bright spot in this set of responses is the story of Daniel and Maria, who operate a convenience store in San Antonio, Texas. They are located only a few blocks from a local high school and have made a decision NOT to sell liquor, alcohol, and tobacco products, because these items could be a temptation to their young customers. This is a radical decision, since most convenience stores get their biggest revenue from exactly these items. So far Daniel and Maria have been able to keep their business going, without allowing "the almighty dollar to compromise their principles!"<sup>4</sup>

Daniel and Maria's story is all the more wonderful when we remember that so many "big" businesses seem to be concerned only with making MORE money. I heard from friends who were "early retired" from corporate giants, and from others who fear that this will happen to them. These realities in their lives are caused by the "downsizing" and "layoffs" we hear mentioned in so many prayer requests.

Some of these large corporations do a lot of charity in the localities where they have offices. Some help provide for educational opportunities for their employees, through night school right in the same building and other kinds of special arrangements.

The employees of these "corporate giants" make almost nothing in comparison with the CEO's and actual owners. In the words of one of my correspondents: "our ordinary employees got raises in the 2-3% range, not quite covering cost of living increases; our CEO got a 15% raise."<sup>5</sup> Many CEO's earn salaries of \$3,000,000. or more a year. In that case, the 15% raise alone would be \$450,000.

While I don't know what the very rich do with their money, I have heard stories over the years about "not so rich" owners of small businesses that have kept employees on the payroll after an injury, or the like, just because the man would not be able to get a job elsewhere.

In a more public way, there are a lot of foundations and other such organizations that have been set up specifically to dispense such vast fortunes. The fame of Blessed Katherine Drexel's family serves as a good example. Likewise, the Domino's Pizza charities are well known. And as we know, many of our Monasteries, and also the Conference, have been blessed by this sort of goodness.



In this respect, I would mention that one of my respondents made a point to call me with a second thought that he felt we should all know. "Tell your Sisters not to be afraid to ask for donations. They are doing us a service when they give us a chance to decide how to spend our money charitably."<sup>6</sup>

I think he is right in this matter. We know the stories about things that are only done to get a "tax write off", but I was surprised to hear from several friends how much of their income goes into taxes.

In addition to the "Social Security tax" and the Federal income tax there can also be state and local income taxes. Then there are the sales taxes, though some states do exempt food and other necessities from this tax. And if the wage earner owns his own home or other property, there are property taxes to be paid. As one friend described his situation: We "paid for our home years ago. However, the property taxes now cost us more per month than the entire mortgage plus property taxes plus insurance did in 1964 when we built the house."<sup>7</sup>

Taking all these taxes into consideration, if the taxpayer can deduct his charitable contributions BEFORE he calculates his overall income and his taxes, that is fine. And even if he doesn't do any charity on his own, look at all that the government does with his tax money! It is these tax dollars that fund the programs for disaster relief after tornados, hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters. Taxes also fund the Head Start programs, the unemployment payments, and the welfare programs. And, we know that the existing budgets of our private charities could never meet all these needs.

Another category of responses point out how constantly the average American and his family are tempted to live beyond their means. You may have noticed the article titled: "The Joneses Are Killing Me" in the December, 1995, issue of Catholic Digest.

But it is more than just neighbors "keeping up with the Joneses." Today it is cities and towns competing for businesses, states competing for federal money, and nations competing for each other's business. Economically speaking, the "credit card mentality" is supposed to keep the factory workers working, the trucking industry working, and the retail sales force working. This is good for the national economy, and even the international economy, so we are told.

Today's modern society has developed a multitude of economic theories that have become very popular subjects for consumers to study. One of my correspondents sent me a new book: GOD WANTS YOU TO BE RICH: "The Theology of Economics."<sup>8</sup> In this book Paul Zane Pilzer sets out to explain exactly how the "free market system" is the fulfillment of God's plan for all of his people! His thesis is built on the promises God made to Abraham after the sacrifice of Isaac.<sup>9</sup> These are the promises of innumerable descendants, unlimited land, and unlimited wealth.

But will using this economic model really be of any help to us as Cloistered Dominican Nuns? I believe we must remember the warning of Pope John Paul II in Vita Consecrata:

Another challenge today is that of a materialism which craves possessions, heedless of the needs and sufferings of the weakest ... The reply of the consecrated life is found in the profession of evangelical poverty ...  
... evangelical poverty is a value in itself ... Its primary meaning, in fact, is to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart.<sup>10</sup>

God has made many more promises to his people since the days of Abraham. The most important are those he made through Jesus Christ, his Beloved Son. It is not land, possessions, or even posterity, but the intimate relationship that we are made to have with God that must shape all of our lives. This, and nothing less, is our "true wealth" as followers of Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ, to be an adopted son of God? Jesus became MAN to restore us to the relationship that God originally intended for us to have with himself. I think it will be worth our while to reflect on this point in the light of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.<sup>11</sup>

The two brothers are growing up in the house. Finally one day, the younger one gets to thinking that he would like to be "just like Dad" and to have everything he wants, when he wants, without having to ask for it. So, he asks for his share of the inheritance ...

Isn't this exactly the same thing that happened in Paradise? Man (Adam and Eve) wanted to be "like God", rather than being content to be creatures of God. And God saw that there was sin, where no sin had been before.

In both cases, the story is the same. Somehow, even if it is ever so "imperceptibly," distance creeps into our relationship. Once the intimate relationship between father and son, between God and Man, is severed, everything is only going to get worse. We go from one sin to another, and another, and another; because we lose our equilibrium, our "value system", our sense of what is right and wrong when we are without this vital and primordial relationship.

Now, if I may conjecture a detail not written down by St. Luke: those two brothers of the parable are adopted sons, and it is clearly JESUS, the First-Born of the Father, who comes to bring us back to God, to save us from our folly.

From here it is easy to see how clearly this parable tells the entire story of our creation and Redemption. This is why for both of the brothers in the parable, there is a necessary encounter with the Cross.

Because Jesus knows exactly what it is to be human, to be made in the image and likeness of God, he lives this reality, this primary relationship to the full. JESUS is the One who shows us how to get our priorities back in order, to get our attention re-directed to our true end, even when it means "death, death on a cross."<sup>12</sup> As a Carmelite nun pointed out to me in the early 1970s: "Life with God is infinitely worth dying for. That is why Jesus died."<sup>13</sup>

One of my correspondents, a dedicated layman, actively involved in his parish's RCIA program, wrote to say how far he thinks the world has gone in "distancing itself" from God. I quote from his letter at some length:

The proclamation by Nietzsche is that God is dead and all that remains is the quest for power, since power is god. Contemporary society lives within this context and accepts the position of Nietzsche, if not in word, [then] in behavior. The quest for power and control has won the day. ... Happiness is to enter into the power struggle and to win. ... we are ruled by those who have acquired the power in the world and most especially economic power. Perhaps that is why Rahner is supposed to have said that Christianity will survive in the next century with those who have the ability to contemplate, who can get beyond the "reality" that we have created for ourselves.<sup>14</sup>

Now, we may feel this bleak picture to be somewhat exaggerated. However, it is true that Man, the world over, is in danger of losing exactly this primordial reality — his vital relationship to God. I heard from a Brother in the Congregation of the Holy Cross, who expressed his concern for the future members of the Church this way:

Working equals fast foods equals less communication in the family. Eating at McDonald's is not eating out ... If the meal is the metaphor for Eucharist, and they don't know the meal how will they ever understand Eucharist.<sup>15</sup>

What does all this say about the future of religious life, as a part of the Church? Another layman, this one the owner of a small business, offered his reflections on our future religious:

The demise of small business is a serious threat to family life. ... When family life falters, the Church is injured. Family life is the back bone of the Church.

The demise of small business may also have an effect upon religious orders and monastic life. They may find that financial support will have to come from large corporations, trust funds, and endowments.

Where do Postulants come from? Certainly not large corporations, trust funds and endowments.<sup>16</sup>

I also heard from a Sister of Mercy who has been involved in executive positions of hospital administration for many years, as well as in many other positions of responsibility for her province. Sister wrote:

We find ourselves planted right in the middle of a world whose economics are driven by politics — (you do this for me and I will do such for you). This world is driven by greed — and lust — sin, and in many instances God is not in it.

The religious orders that are thriving today are those that have kept their vows of poverty. Look at Mother Theresa's order. Our poorer Orders are the ones that are growing in numbers — not the ones that are steeped in this world's assets. Money does not "buy" subjects and far too many orders are dying on the vine with a lack of fresh young invigorating subjects.<sup>17</sup>

Did any of these thoughts ever even enter our minds when we took our vows? We probably wondered if we were going to be able to keep them. And we continue to pray for that grace of perseverance, I am sure. But —

How do we live in poverty today, at the end of the 20th century, dealing with complex financial matters in providing for our futures? Deciding whether to repair or replace roofs, heating equipment, etc.? Weighing the health needs of our Sisters against the rising costs of medical care? Determining a just wage for those who work for us?

How do we maintain the delicate position of representing the Church, as religious must, when dealing with mistaken orders, with late deliveries, or with any other of the ordinary problems of life in the business world?

We know that St. Dominic treasured poverty in his own life, and in the lives of his followers. But what about us today — Dominican Nuns living at the end of the 20th century? Is it realistic for us to attempt to live as Dominic and the early Nuns lived? What happens in our

hearts when we realize how the poor of the world lived in the days when our Order was born? In the words of Fr. Vicaire, the poor were in a situation that:

can be called traditional poverty. It is characterized by a weakness of means on all levels: social, economic, skilled trade, psychological and physiological. Generally speaking it did not mean total distress. The poor normally managed to get along somehow or other...

The traditionally poor man was not opposed so much to the rich man (*dives*) as to the powerful man (*potens*). He was not so much in extreme want as in a physical and moral dependence. ...<sup>18</sup>

Now, as I conclude these opening remarks on the Economic Culture of our world today, and give you Fr. Boniface Ramsey, I want to offer a response to my question about whether it is possible for us here and now, today and tomorrow, to live this way?

I would like to set before our minds' eyes, before our hearts the memory of a man who passionately lived the Dominican charism in our own day. I am sure you too have read the recent issue of IDI dedicated to the memory of Fr. Damien Byrne, but let us listen again to the words of one of his assistants who wrote:

He also taught me how to pack all the things I needed for our long trips in a small bag; then with a smile he would say, "Now, Frank, get rid of half of the things you packed". I will never carry a suitcase anymore. One hand bag is more than enough.<sup>19</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Letter from Sr. M. J., RSM, dated March, 1996.
2. Phone call from Sr. J., OP, March 24, 1996.
3. Letter from A.P.H., dated March 5, 1996.
4. Letter from G.Y., dated March 18, 1996.
5. Letter from M.M., dated March 10, 1996.
6. Phone call from L.J.H. on April 22, 1996.
7. Letter from C.R., dated March 2, 1996.
8. Pilzer, Paul Zane, God Wants You to be Rich: The Theology of Economics, New York, NY, Simon and Schuster, 1995.
9. cf. Genesis 22:17-18.
10. John Paul II, Pope, Vita Consecrata, Vatican City, March 25, 1996, # 89-90.



11. cf. Luke 15:11-32.
12. Vesper Response, Good Friday.
13. Conversation with Sr. M. J., OCD, June, 1975.
14. Letter from T.W., April, 1996.
15. Letter from Br. S.W., CSC, dated March 22, 1996.
16. Letter from P.J.H., dated March 19, 1996.
17. Letter from Sr. M.W., RSM, dated February 27, 1996.
18. Vicaire, Marie-Humbert, OP, Genius of St. Dominic, The, edited by Peter Lobo, OP, Nagpur, India, Dominican Publications, pp. 181-183.
19. Vicente, OP, Rev. Frank, "Farewell to a Friend" in I.D.I., #340, Special Issue, April 1996, p. 73.





# THE EFFECTS OF MODERN ECONOMICS ON OUR WAY OF LIFE

Boniface Ramsey, O.P.  
Province of St. Joseph

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS<sup>1</sup>

When I reflected on why I might have been asked to give a talk in this area it occurred to me that it was perhaps because I had been Promoter of Social Justice in my province, then in North America for quite a while, until eight years ago.

When two years ago I was asked to make this presentation I was a different person from who I am today. At the time I was living in a poor neighborhood in what I have been told is the second or third-poorest parish in the Archdiocese of Newark, namely Sacred Heart Parish in Jersey City, in the midst of the black ghetto, with a great deal of drug activity, and so forth. Double and triple murders are not foreign to the neighborhood. There was a triple murder about two years ago, just one or two blocks away from the priory. A very tough neighborhood! Now I'm living at St. Vincent Ferrer Parish, which you could say is the cream of American urban life. Certainly it is a neighborhood that "looks good." David Rockefeller lives across the street from our High School, and there is no dearth of other wealthy persons within the parish boundaries.

To balance that change I've gone from the ivory tower of academic life to being thrust into the practicalities of parish life. Whereas in the past, before last December when I became prior and pastor, I never had to think about economics, now I've been thinking about almost little else than economics!

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In any event, let's begin as a Dominican might begin by giving a definition of the word economic. It simply comes from a Greek word, *oikonomia*, relating to our term *household*. Hence, "economic" refers in the most generic way to the management of household resources. By extension, it refers to the management of the resources of a given group or society. You can speak, if you want, of the household of the United States, the household of the world, the household of St. Stephen's Priory or the household of the Monastery at Newark. This kind of management necessarily includes a financial aspect, which is often, if not always, given priority.

We may ask ourselves, as we are early on into this presentation, a question that is inevitably going to come up. Namely, in what way can we speak legitimately about the role of the economic in the context of monastic religious life? In other words, can we talk about economics and monastic life in the same breath? Don't they seem to be two very different things, in some ways opposed to one another, and incompatible with one another?

In answer to that, reflect that organized monastic life (as opposed to disorganized monastic life!), has always had procurators and bursars; and a superior's responsibilities have always included some kind of general economic oversight. In response to that question I also

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: This talk was transcribed from the tape, and reviewed by Father Ramsey.

mention the fact that part of the monastic's reluctance to talk about economics arises out of a kind of suspicion of material property. However, the Christian tradition is very clear. Material property is either good or neutral, it's never bad. That's very, very clear in mainstream Christian thought from the Fathers on, if not in Scripture itself. But the *management* of property may be bad, whether because of ignorance or because of intention or will. In other words, having any kind of property, in itself, is either a good thing or an indifferent thing, a neutral thing. It's what you *do* with it that makes the possession of it good or bad. It becomes good when it is managed well. Good management legitimizes the possession of resources, and in the monastic context good management implies conformity to the Gospel, conformity to the rule, and conformity to economic reality. We'll return to that later.

Let me make a kind of digression here in speaking about economic reality in the setting of monastic life. Let me say something about the virtues associated with economics. The governing virtue as far as your own Constitutions state it is *poverty* (LCM # 264). From the perspective of that governing virtue these are some other virtues that are associated with the economic. First of all justice, secondly prudence or discretion. It is hard to know which of those two should go first. Prudence, in a way, governs justice, but justice is usually associated with the economic reality more intimately than is prudence. There is generosity, even magnificence, the big deed. The people who, for example, built St. Vincent Ferrer, where I am pastor, engaged in an act of magnificence. The people who built the House of Studies in Washington did something magnificent. Finally, there is thrift. I wasn't so sure whether that was a virtue but I've seen it listed among the virtues just recently, so I add it. Of course, it is not to be identified with stinginess. All these virtues — justice, prudence, generosity, magnificence, thrift — have been practiced in the history of the Church and in the history of the Order. They are not foreign to us, none of them, including magnificence.

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This brings us to the topic at hand, which is the present-day economic mentality and the present-day economic situation. These are really two different things. Mentality and situation differ widely from place to place. Here obviously we're talking about the United States. There are certain positive aspects of our country's economic situation that should be mentioned at the start.

First of all there is a fluctuating but *growing awareness of limited resources*, especially in the area of energy. You may say this is a bad thing, the diminishing of resources, or the fact that resources are limited. But the *awareness* of it is a good thing. Virtually any awareness of anything, any knowledge, is a good thing. And knowledge of a bad thing is a good thing in this case.

Another positive aspect is a fluctuating but *growing concern for the environment*. I'm purposely using "fluctuating" here, because this concern goes on and off. There is an awareness, for example, of limited resources, but every now and then when the Saudis come through with a couple billion more barrels of oil it slips our minds that oil is limited. A lot depends on whatever is the current attitude of government toward the environment. There are moments when we go back to our old idea that resources are infinite, that, e.g., the ocean is limitless, and so forth.

A third aspect is a fluctuating but *growing concern for health-related issues*. For instance, we are aware as we never had been before of the fact of the impact of alcoholism. We have a greater understanding of alcoholism itself. Whereas as recently as 15 years ago to be



drunk was a joke, now we see it as a sickness. And we also see it as an economic reality. The same can be said about the use of tobacco, and the same with regard to other things that previously we had overlooked or taken for granted. Health in the workplace is a concern as it has never been before. And health is an economic issue.

*A growing sense of interdependence, that we are all related to one another*, is another positive aspect. There is nothing or very little that I do, even should it be in the solitude of my room, that does not have an impact on other people. If I ruin a stream on my property, it's not merely my property that is touched. I know now that it is going to affect other parts of the earth. If I burn things on my property and create smoke it's not just my property that is touched, it is the neighborhood that is affected, and ultimately, to some degree or another, the world, the earth. It is good to know this, and it may help.

Another positive aspect of the present-day economic situation is that *we have, in the developed world, a kind of tradition of economic rights*. This is not necessarily a very long tradition. It's only a little over 100 years old, but it's there.

Finally, *there is rapid communication*. In other words, when something goes wrong in one place word gets out very rapidly; when something good happens in one place, word gets out very rapidly. We can respond more quickly, more readily than we have ever been able to before.

These are positive aspects, although many even of these positive aspects, as you see, have a kind of fluctuating character to them — there are ups and downs.

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Now let's talk about some negative aspects. What always fascinates me, especially because I am a New Yorker and I face it all the time, is *advertising*. Advertising often appeals to people's lowest instincts, for example, their acquisitiveness and their sexual curiosity. It fascinates me that a mere brand name — one particular brand name — will make a dress or a pair of jeans superior to another set of jeans or dress put out by a different manufacturer. It fascinates me that brand names now are prominently displayed. The brand name is the most important aspect now of a lot of material that we buy, especially clothing that younger people wear. Our acquisitiveness, our desire to possess, is being catered to. It's fascinating to me that advertisers have discovered that putting a man and a woman in a seductive position together can sell coffee. What this reveals of the human psyche is tremendously interesting.

Another negative aspect: *advertising that is directed to children*. And of course we've become especially aware of this with respect to tobacco. Consider Joe Camel. Joe Camel presumably is appealing not to adults; he is directed to teenagers and even younger people.

*Consumerism now appears even among the poor and among children*. The children's market is in the tens of billions. Children see things on television, ask their parents for them, inveigle things out of their parents, embarrass their parents into giving them to them. And they get them. The desire to have the best and the most recent is to be found even among the poor, in poor neighborhoods. There are, as you probably well know, and as I certainly saw when I was in Jersey City, people walking around in shabby clothing who live in the most run down buildings but who have the latest make of sneakers because sneakers, where I was in Jersey City, are *status*. And status is what consumerism appeals to, among other things.

Another very bad aspect is the fact of *the predominance now of a youth and health culture*; call it a "beauty culture" if you want. Now as a matter of fact advertisers are becoming

aware that this is unrealistic, and more and more they are using ordinary looking folks rather than the most beautiful people they can purchase. More and more they are using nondescript folks and even older folks to project a less prepossessing and unattainable image. But the youth and health culture, the beauty culture is still out there.

Another negative aspect, and we have experienced this especially in the last two or three years, is a *questioning of economic rights*. Economic rights we have taken for granted and thought would only increase are now being questioned and even whittled away. There is a questioning also (once again this is something of a recent development) of the need to protect our limited resources and the environment. When the environment and limited resources are confronted with business, it is often business that wins, as you well know. We can say here that quite simply it is the triumph of the short term over the long term. Americans are a short-term people as opposed to the Japanese or Europeans.

Another negative aspect is a *growing disparity between rich and poor*. I don't know if this is something that is very evident when we walk out into the street (if we do walk out into the street). One reason why it might not be evident is because nowadays everybody pretty much dresses the same. There is a certain generic culture: it's chic for everybody to be wearing bluejeans and such. So we're liable not to know that there is this disparity; but having moved to the Upper East Side in the last five months I have become very aware of it. Out on the street you may not see too much, but I have been in apartments that are simply stunning for the wealth that they imply. Simply stunning! And yet even in this wealthy neighborhood there are many, many people sleeping in doorways, including in the doorways of St. Vincent Ferrer Church. So there is a disparity, and we are told that there is. Sr. Amata mentioned, for example, the fact that a CEO making a salary of 3 million dollars will get an increase of 15 percent, while somebody way down the line might get an annual increase of 2 or 3 percent, which barely covers inflation.

Another thing we have seen happen on a large scale, and which is perhaps being remedied at least a little in these days, is *the discrediting and decline of unionism*. A significant percent of the American labor force was in some kind of union up until 30 or 40 years ago, but there has been a decline since then. We have become more and more aware of the fact, and of course some political movements have emphasized it, that there is corruption in the unions. This shouldn't surprise us, of course; there is corruption everywhere. But this has been made much of and has contributed to the discrediting of unions, which are really nothing more than protective agencies for workers.

Another negative aspect of the contemporary financial and economic situation is *the loss of jobs for the unskilled* and people who have only minimal skills. We're talking about *people* here, the proverbial ditchdigger, for example, or your basic maintenance person. There seem to be fewer jobs for that kind of person.

The trend toward *corporate downsizing* has resulted in a considerable loss of bluecollar and whitecollar jobs. I don't know if you read the paper but, within the last two months I believe, there was a very informative series in the New York Times called "*The Downsizing of America*." It went on for about a week, and it was an excellent analysis of the situation.

*The abuse of workers* through bad working conditions, inadequate pay and the like has come to the fore. We may think that there are enough laws and protections for workers. There are some, certainly, but it is surprising how many there aren't. Then one wonders whether, if everything were protected, businesses would even be able to survive? There is a lot that people who make laws have to take into account. The more protections there are, the more costly

things are, and the more prices go up for the consumer. But the fact is, there are still many bad working conditions, and there is certainly no doubt that many workers receive inadequate pay.

Another bad situation is *the abuse of consumers*, which occurs, first of all, through misleading advertising. Each one of those advertisements that features sex selling alcohol, or sex selling automobiles, or that proposes some status symbol, is, when you come right down to it, misleading. In fact all advertising is almost by its very nature misleading to some degree or other. Overpricing is another aspect of consumer abuse. For example, all you need to do is compare the price of a generic drug with a brand name drug to see how much things are being overpriced, and for no reason whatsoever except the status that a particular brand name confers. Unsatisfactory products are another thing. Products, as Sr. Amata observed, are designed to wear out after a particular time. They are designed to become out of date, in that you can't get parts for them anymore, and so must replace them with newer products.

Finally (and this is my 13th point!) we experience just a *general sense of decline and lack of confidence* in the moral strength, financial strength, economic strength, military strength (to the extent that that's important) of the United States in particular, and of the West, and perhaps of the world in general. It is a sense that things are wrong pretty much everywhere and that it is virtually impossible to set them right.

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Now let us look at the impact of this on the contemplative monastic life.

Let me begin by saying quite simply that this is the world in which the contemplative lives, the world from which the contemplative cannot escape even if she may be spared many aspects of it. It is true that her future is assured in large part. She doesn't have to worry about where the next meal is coming from or whether there will be a roof over her head, so she doesn't have the worry and concern that the breadwinners of a family might have in wondering about the next meal or a new roof.

But none the less she is affected in various ways, perhaps in the quality of the products that she uses. Certainly she is affected if she has any contact with lay people. She is affected by the very fact that the lay people with whom she comes in contact are affected, and deeply.

How does she respond to this world and these facts?


I think the first way that she responds is simply by being aware, at least in a general way, if not in a particular way. Something like ten or twelve years ago, when Damian Byrne was Master of the Order, I was asked to speak at just such a conference as this in Farmington, Connecticut. I said that the sisters should read the newspaper. I continue to believe that the sisters should read the newspaper. It is essential to know, at least in a general way, what is going on. I don't believe it will sully you, except that you might get the print on your fingers. And what about the people who are going to waste time reading the newspaper? Well, if they don't have a newspaper to waste time with, they'll waste time with something else. And if they're going to get silly thoughts in their mind, they've already got them there. It will be good for those who are alert and open, and it's not going to ruin anybody who's apt to be ruined.

Another way to respond to this world of economic concerns is by not seeking to escape from it, as if it would be possible to escape from it, or as if holiness consisted in that kind of escape. I'm sure you have heard many times, and I take it as one of the great insights of



monastic life, that the monastic is in a mysterious way plunged more deeply into the real situation of the world than is anybody else. If that's true, that's certainly not escape.

Still another way to respond to this world (and this is a really Dominican thing to say) is by affirming the good and opposing the bad. There is a principle here. The monastery is meant to be different from "the world." It ought to be ruled by justice and charity rather than by a lust for profit or status or a spirit of exploitation. I don't think that anything is gained by trying to be different from the world. Rather, one is different from it, if one simply follows one's principles. I don't think touting one's difference is the good way to go. I think just being and doing what one is supposed to be and do is the right road to follow, and then it will turn out that one will be different from the world. Yet this difference from the world only has meaning to the extent that we're talking about the world of sin, the world of evil, not the world of human pain and struggle. We must never forget that we ourselves are, in our own way, each one of us, deeply involved in the world — in all its aspects.

Finally, the contemplative, especially the Dominican contemplative, should approach the world with discretion. By that I mean that she should test all things, reflect upon all things. Dominicans are supposed to approach reality, whether that reality be God or a tree or another human being, with intelligence and with discretion. 



may, 1996

# ENCLOSURE

Dominic formed  
in Drouille an upper room  
whose apostolic oneness  
was the dwelling place of  
Father and Son, the  
community of God  
enclosed in a human  
community to be a  
redemptive sign that  
forgiveness is the way  
out of the world's  
enclosure.

BILL BARRON

By providing holy ground  
for prayer and for living in the  
spirit of the Beatitudes,  
the observance of enclosure  
can be said to be formative.

SISTER LEE



# UNDERSTANDING ENCLOSURE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

William Barron, O.P.

## The World and the Upper Room

I

*The one who enters [the sheepfold] through the gate is shepherd of the sheep; the keeper opens the gate for him. The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own by name and leads them out. When he has brought out those that are his, he walks in front of them, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. (Jn 10:2-4)*

When the Father, the keeper of the gate of the cross, opened it for Jesus, the Word entered the upper room of forgetfulness and fear. Huddled there in that sheepfold, Jesus heard and saw the world in the scattered remains of the flock which he had gathered by word and deed. A darkness had settled upon this dwelling place of the Word, for being without their shepherd, for even so brief a time, they had nothing other than themselves to see and hear. Inevitably, the flock of the upper room slipped back into the crowd and became indistinguishable from the mass of humanity. Into the dim evening light of the upper room, Jesus dawned with his human wounds which he showed to them — with his own body raised out of forgetfulness and fear to Peace by the gate-keeper of the cross. And into the clay of forgetfulness and fear which was returning his disciples to the world, the Word breathed his risen presence as breath of the beginning, breath for the life which he was making with them — his own breath breathed eternally by the Father as Word of Life, breath fully breathed over to the Father at the crossing gate of the cross, the unique expiration of love which returned Jesus — in one breath of life — both to his Father and to his flock.

The Easter appearance of Jesus in the upper room made the flock gathered there the place where the Word dwells with the Father. (Jn 14:23) The upper room is the historical locus of the reunion of God in the meeting of Jesus and his disciples. Suddenly, these sheep, who had only themselves to see and hear, saw and heard the Word whose whole presence to them was a seeing and hearing of the Father. (Jn 5:19-20, 30; 14:9) They saw Jesus in the presence of God at the same time they saw God's Word present to themselves. With his mortal wounds, and in the body of his life and death, *the Word had become flesh* for them that Easter morning *to make his dwelling among them* in the upper room; and for the first time *they saw his glory, the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love.* (Jn 1:14) Proclaimed as an

historical moment, the disciples of the Word would always look back at Easter as the Beginning: *In the beginning was the Word...*, they would proclaim, and *Through him we came into being, and we found life, life for the light of men.* (Jn 1:1, 3-4)

The coming into being of the disciples "at the beginning" was their formation as the flock of the upper room through seeing and hearing the risen Jesus as the Word sent by the Father. This recognition was their entrance into the communal life of Father and Son, the reciprocal side of the Word's resurrected entrance into their fold of forgetfulness and fear: *I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me in the same way that the Father knows me and I know the Father...* (Jn 10:14-15) He therefore called them by name, the name that was the Father's name: *I have made **your name** known to those you gave me out of the world.* (Jn 17:6) It was the name which was Jesus's name, the name which the Father had given him: *...protect them with your name which **you have given me**...* (Jn 17:11) Therefore Jesus called them by their name, the "Presence of the Father to the Word and of the Word to the Father", namely the dwelling place of the living community of God: *To them I have revealed your name, and **I will continue to reveal it so that your love for me may live in them, and I may live in them.*** (Jn 17:26)

Having formed his sheep by name as disciples of the upper room, Jesus leads forth his flock. But he does not lead them away from the context of Easter glory, nor are they abandoning the dwelling of the community of God, for they themselves are both the place of that risen glory and the abode of the unity shared by Father and Son: *I have given them the glory you gave me **that they may be one, as we are one — I living in them, you living in me — that their unity may be complete.*** (Jn 17:22) Rather, Jesus leads his flock according to the trajectory by which the Father leads him: to complete unity in their living human history, in their living presence to one another in time: *As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world...* (Jn 17:18). Therefore, Jesus's Easter procession of his flock out into the world is his own coming to the Father (Jn 17:13); in other words, his return to the Father and to the upper room is his leading his flock to bring the world to the Father and to the upper room: *I am in the world no more, he tells the Father, **but [my disciples] are in the world as I come to you.*** (Jn 17:11) This prayer can be — indeed is — equally prayed to the Father by the now-living Jesus risen out of forgetfulness and fear **and** by his now-living flock risen out of forgetfulness and fear. Jesus is in the world no more because he has passed from the world through the gate of the cross to the Father and to the upper room, a passage identified by Jesus with his disciples' being in the world. The cross is now theirs; and **through this gate**, by which they returned to the Father to become completely one, they go out to the world in order to return those not yet of the flock (Jn 10:16) to the place of beginning, the place before forgetfulness and beyond fear, the place where the Word is Peace: *I am the gate. **Whoever enters through me will be safe. She will go in and out, and find pasture.*** (Jn 10:9) Through the life of oneness and unity engendered by passing through this gate, the flock becomes the living Word of life entering the world to bring it out of its bondage by enabling it to hear the voice and to see the deeds of the Word in the flock's own word of oneness and unity: *I pray*



*also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be [one] in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. (Jn 17:20-21)*

## II

The unity of the upper room is evangelical; or, put the other way around, without unity and oneness in the upper room, there is no living presence of the Word by which humanity can escape forgetfulness and fear. With only itself to see and hear, the world is continually re-enclosed within the forgetfulness and fear which marks both its history and its possibilities. Thus the seeing and hearing which takes place within the upper room – the Easter unity that is Jesus's seeing and hearing of the Father now given to his flock (Jn 17:7-8) – is the continuation of Jesus's salvation of the world. This salvation transpires in the living relationships which the disciples establish among themselves in the sheepfold of the Word, that is to say in relationships formed according to the history and trajectory, the sending and returning of the Word who departed from the world to be historically one with the Father in the upper room: *A little while now and the world will see me no more; but **you see me as one who has life, and you will have life.** On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.* (Jn 14:19-20) Seeing the living Jesus in their own unity, they proclaim that unity – the life unity of Father and Son – as life for the world. But their unity is life for the world only in so far as they live their unity as life for one another, only in so far as they are really one. Without such living oneness, there is no upper room to which to return the world to the Father.

The seeing and hearing of the disciples of the upper room is concretely constituted by their own words and deeds. It is seeing the mutuality of their actions in behalf of one another, and hearing the voice of peace in their own words of life. The evangelization of the world begins in these concrete activities of life shared in the upper room. Such human concreteness, however, implies historicity, and so evangelical unity must exist as a continuum through time – it must have a specific beginning whose content is brought to completion through its historical passage as the life of real people.

The beginning of evangelical unity was not inaugurated by the disciples' seeing and hearing of themselves in forgetfulness and fear, but by their hearing and seeing the forgiving Word of life who called them out of that darkness. As Jesus entered the sheepfold on that first day of the week, the peace and forgiveness of this specific flock became the concrete life of the Word through time – the Word's beginning, passage, and consummation before the Father in human history. In the upper room they both saw the physical presence of forgiveness (the human wounds of his risen body) and heard its actual voice (Peace be with you...Peace be with you) *as their own presence and voice*, i.e. *for them* as real life – they saw and heard the Easter Word's historical reunion with the Father becoming their own reunion through the power which the Word's life gave them to forgive one another.

It is curious that the *Gospel of Eternal Life* records nothing of the conversation and activities of the upper room during that crucial period in which human history was without Jesus. This would seem to have been the logical time for theology, the apostles' immediate coming to human terms with the Jesus-events just unfolded, events still fresh in their historical memories. Instead, John's gospel, which is written to help us enter into life through belief in Jesus (Jn 20:31), and is therefore uninterested in recording historical events which lack life, gives us only tangential references to what was heard and seen among the sheep in that "time outside the Word" (an historical moment which is therefore perfectly representative of all human society before, or as yet untouched, by redemption). Obliquely the Gospel of John tells us two things about this period of forgetfulness and fear. First, we learn that the disciples feared and expected the encroachment of the world. They were afraid that their inevitable and only trajectory was reversion to the world, to a seeing and hearing which would engulf them in the confines of suffering and death just as surely as it had swallowed up Jesus. Secondly we are given the example of Thomas, the "twin" of that world without the shepherd. In his return to the upper room, after the appearance of the risen Jesus, he exhibited that same fear previously shared by the others, namely, that what he had become because of the society he shared with them through hearing and seeing Jesus would, now that Jesus was dead, pass out of memory and experience into forgetfulness: *Only if the very one who died is now alive, can I remain with the rest of you. But of course this is impossible. So what Jesus was making us to be is now over because he no longer lives. I fear that our unity will dissolve because memories are not strong enough to maintain this bond. Our society, our common life, must succumb to the forgetfulness which will overtake each one of us in turn.* (These were also the words and actions of the disciples who were leaving Jerusalem for Emmaus. Their discussion of the life of Jesus would have been an Easter proclamation only for the fact that the Word was not risen or alive either in their going out from Jerusalem or in their disconnected recollections of his life.)

Thomas represents the upper room without Jesus, merely an enclosure of descending darkness: fear of death, fear that the world would claim them again as its own, fear that their own efforts could not stave off these threats to life; fear that forgetfulness would overtake the beginning which Jesus had made with them; but especially the fear that they were not serving one another by these fears, they were not entering into life through each other but were, instead, despite themselves, inviting each other to sin against the memory and promise of Jesus. They could not loose themselves from this trend; they could not attain the peace which they sought; indeed, they began to doubt whether that peace had truly existed. This was the forgetfulness and fear into which Jesus rose that Easter morn. To their seeing and hearing of each other, Jesus brought his living presence before the Father which, as we have seen, is his seeing and hearing of the Father alive in their real presence to one another. In Jesus's return, the disciples were freed from the trajectory of life without him, of history without return. Through exercising the commission and power of Easter forgiveness, the disciples entered the gate of each other's lives to be reunited with one another **through** and **as** Jesus's historical reunion with the Father. By the service of

forgiveness, the disciples made the Word's passage to the Father their own, for in the Word the Father opens the gate of every sin to unity in the upper room.

To appreciate what occurred historically when the risen Lord inaugurated the community of God in the life of the upper room, we again turn to Thomas. *The other disciples kept telling him: 'We have seen the Lord!' (Jn 20:25).* This testimony was not the declaration of a marvelous fact, a phenomenon of faith that existed outside of the community which professed it. Rather, this was the disciples solemnly assuring Thomas, *We are talking about what we know, we are testifying to what we have seen...* (Jn 3:11). As a **unity**, the disciples of the upper room **are** the testimony that the Lord lives — they speak of what they know and see in each other through the experience of mutual forgiveness. But this **lived** testimony of Easter forgiveness is not of their own making but is rather their continued fidelity to the way, the truth, and the life of the risen Word (a teaching given especially to Thomas, Jn 14:5). And Thomas knows this distinction: *I will never believe without probing the actual historical cause of my forgiveness, without physically being in contact with it, without seeing and hearing it, without probing the nail prints in his hands, without putting my finger in the nail marks and my hand into his side.* (Jn 20:25). Thomas knows that he cannot enter their community of belief except through the gate of truth: *The Jesus who died must now be really alive for me in order for me to be alive and one with you again. I can live what you see and hear of the risen Jesus only if it really is him alive in your mutuality. Will **your** life really forgive my concrete history with you, my personal and human forgetfulness and fears? Will **you** free me from the world to return me through **this** history to God as our common way of life together?* Unity in the upper room can only be *evangelical* life if it is the life of Jesus who, in our history, made the passage of life to the Father through the gate of the cross, the gate of the upper room. Thomas reminds us that only by this way, this truth, this life will those not of the flock hear and see the risen Jesus who lived and died for them. (Jn 17:20-21)

Of course the example of Thomas also points out that there is a difference between the Easter appearances of the living Jesus and the living Jesus alive in the community of the upper room. But this is not a difference between Jesus and the community of his historical life. The difference, rather, bespeaks the reality which the evangelical unity of the upper room has been sent to overcome, namely, the historical condition of human life which forgets its origin in God and is incognizant of its purposeful consummation in him. With Jesus, the historical condition of forgetfulness and incognizant fear passed in the upper room to life before the Father in the historical unity of the flock whom he calls by name. The beginning which he made with his disciples continues, therefore, as **his** beginning proclaimed to the world in the unity of the upper room, even though as a beginning in time under the conditions of the alienation it is meant to overcome, it was, on that Easter morn, an event uniquely the disciples' own.



### III

Seeing and hearing constitutes the nature of societies everywhere. But in the upper room, seeing and hearing removes the forgetfulness and fear which is the experiential definition of all humanly originated societies. The community of the upper room is a new human beginning, a revelation to the disciples of the origin of all things with the Father since in seeing and hearing the risen Jesus, they are brought into the presence of the Word coming from the Father and returning to him. Freed from the forgetfulness and fear which encloses human history, the disciples became cognizant of the beginning and end of all things. As their own seeing and hearing was enveloped in this Easter procession of the eternal Word, their community acquired an historical trajectory through time of evangelical purpose: they were given *the* beginning and *the* end. In the beginning that was Easter, they were opened to the beginning itself, and in their life they would bring all people — all sheep not yet of the flock — to the end of all things, to the end which is that beginning, the love of Father and Son. Thus the linear trajectory of evangelical life is that historical circle of love which encompasses all that the Father loves in the love which is the Father's own, namely, the Word and the upper room.

So understanding the origin and end of all things in the Easter Word, the unity of the upper room declared to the world a truth the world could not see or hear in its own experience: *In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. He was present to God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be... He was in the world, and through him the world was made, yet the world did not know who he was...* (Jn 1:1-3, 10) The human world was incognizant of its own origin and end, it was deaf and blind to the truth which the experiences of social interaction would otherwise have revealed, because the natural seeing and hearing of God that was Edenic right reason was lost to historical nature. Now, however, in the glory of the Word himself, in the oneness of the upper room and its historical passage through time (Jn 1:14), the God whose voice was once heard, whose form had been clearly seen by the eye of reason walking with us in the cool evenings of paradise, is heard and seen again by God's children (Jn 1:12) who have come to life in the Easter light of the Word (Jn 1:4). Previous to Jesus' entrance into the sheepfold, *No one (had) ever seen God* (Jn 1:18) because of the historical conditions we had set for ourselves. But having seen and heard the risen Jesus, the disciples enter the world with an evangelical announcement, a recreation to banish created reason's forgetfulness and fear: God is now visible and audible despite our historical closure to his presence for *...the only Son, ever at the Father's side, ...has revealed him.* (Jn 1:18). The recreated oneness of the upper room brings the society of those made in God's image at creation back to a conscious and right relationship — back to a peace — with God which the world cannot give (Jn 14:27), the living Easter peace of the Word who comes forth and returns to the Father in love.

*My testimony is valid* (i.e. the historical life of the Word, the seeing and hearing of the Father which the disciples now live and proclaim), Jesus says, *because I know*



*where I came from and where I am going; you know neither the one nor the other.* (Jn 8:14) In the Easter recreation of unity in the upper room among disciples who now know where they have come from and where they are going, the world appears not only in terms of its origin and end, but also in its historical condition. Compared to the freedom and purpose of the Easter flock, the world of human society is revealed as a reality **enclosed**. The community of the sheepfold can see this enclosure in the forgetfulness and fear of human individuals and societies, a state of existence into which they were again descending until the Easter appearance of forgiveness which joined them to the life of the Word in oneness with the Father.

The forgetfulness and fear which characterizes life in the world is both immediate and ultimate. Immediately, the world forgets that what it newly creates, since it appears under various guises of individual and social difference, is merely the sameness of what has been. Ultimately, human society does not move from some point in the past towards its communal betterment through ever improving human conditions. Rather the human world stands **immediately** outside the gates of Eden. The world is not on some long road away from paradise heading to a specific completion. There is no teleology of the Fall. The human historical condition is the removal of any conscious engagement with an ultimately purposeful end. Only the teleology of Easter restores to us a consciousness of origin and purpose outside of the world's self-defining limits. Only the evangelical unity of the Word's historical life informs human consciousness with the image of love which its own history cannot recall – the love which its own history has forgotten.

The immediacy of human fear is generated by suffering and death, the loss of meaning in a context of meaning, the loss of identity in a community that generates human meaning. Suffering and death disassociate human life from the processes which consciously produce human life: what is, and what will be, can, and will continue without me. Ultimately, the very human endeavors which seem to hold promise are perceived as weak shams since they relinquish to suffering and oblivion the actual concreteness of the individual and social experiences which they produce. Jesus, however, loses nothing which the Father has given him. (Jn 17:12): *My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father is greater than all, in what he has given me, and there is no snatching out of his hand.* (Jn 10:27-30)

The evangelical beginning and end of the upper room is to bring the world out of this ever-present condition, i.e. to bring the world out of its enclosure in this forgetfulness and fear into the openness and freedom of the upper room's living unity. The freedom of the children of God is their shared freedom from the world's enclosure. This freedom is evangelical since, transpiring through human history, it leads what has come forth from God back to him through the life of the upper room, the historical presence of the Word before the Father. **The fundamental salvific mission of the disciples of Jesus, therefore, is to be completely one** – to be the witness of truly lived unity over and against the **enclosure** of the world. *I do not pray for them alone.*

*I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. (Jn 17:20-21)*

## **The Enclosure of the World**

### **I**

#### *Establishing a Human Perspective on the Human Condition*

Current academic thought, especially poststructuralism, tells us that there is no proper or fixed vantage point from which to look at and evaluate contemporary life in a definitive way: there is no *outside* from which to look in. Of course without a secure standpoint, no moral perspective on our world is possible. Running counter to this relativism is Marxism's historical ontology which sees a dialectical and mutually defining relationship between what people are what they have put in place, between their living essence and those relationships by which they actually exist. Marxism's historical ontology provides us with two conceptions about human life that are helpful in building an analytical platform from which to understand the world. First, Marx reasoned that the individual appears in society as a living and conscious expression of specific inter-human relations that have apriori historical origin. In a very early set of notes, Marx elaborates this conception: "As *human nature* is the *true common life* [*Gemeinwesen* = community] of man, men through the activation of their *nature create* and produce a human *common life*, a social essence which is no abstractly universal power opposed to the single individual, but is the essence or nature of every single individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth."<sup>1</sup>

Second, Marx recognized that the specific material and cultural relations into which individuals must enter in order to produce and exchange their means of life have a concrete and definable shape: "society does not consist of individuals; (rather) it expresses the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves."<sup>2</sup> The origin of these relationships and connections can be traced, and their present structure analyzed. Since these relational structures define what people are, there exists the possibility, then, of developing a real historical perspective from which to accurately evaluate contemporary life without stepping *outside* of it. All of Marx's conceptual and practical efforts up to and including *Capital* are based on the possibility of constructing such an historical critique.

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Marx, *Excerpt-Notes of 1844* in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. and trans. Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967) 271-72.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, ed. and trans., David McLellan (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972) 77.

Marx's survey of his own society led him to the conviction that the structural relations by which people existed, and by which they were thus being defined, were robbing them of the conscious and constitutive experience of being individuals-in-community, their historical and true "essence". There was an essential contradiction to modern existence. "The more deeply we go back into history," Marx observes in the *Grundrisse*, "the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole... Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity." He goes on to point out that "the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social...relations."<sup>3</sup> Marx's historical ontology created a perspective from which he was able to observe that the concrete existence of his contemporaries was in fact a contradiction, an alienation from what historically was, and therefore *should have remained*, their common, that is to say communal, essence.

The truth of modern life, in other words, was that it was false. And its falsehood was a direct consequence of the disappearance of community, the *common life* which is the essence of human subjectivity and the living definition of each individual. We are all familiar with Marx's condemnations of capitalism. But are we aware that these condemnations were specifically occasioned by Marx's perception that subjective human community was destroyed and replaced by the objective social relations established by capitalism and its mode of production? This was a situation which also altered the concrete life of the individual since capitalism's removal of the living communal context from individual labor in the activity of the social production of the means of life left the individual experientially, and thus essentially, isolated from itself and others. Obviously, this problem would be resolved if authentic human community were restored. Not surprisingly, therefore, Marx and Engels, in the *German Ideology*, in a passage which might be called the historical material mirror of the upper room, speak of the absolute necessity of re-establishing living community if the concrete determinations of capital are to be reversed: "The transformation, through the division of labour, of personal powers (relationships) into material powers, cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind, but only by the action of individuals in again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labor. This is not possible without the community. *Only in community with others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible.* In the previous substitutes for the community, in the State, etc., personal freedom has existed only for individuals who developed within the relationships of the ruling class, and only in so far as they were individuals of this class. *The illusory community, in which individuals have up till now combined, always took on an independent existence in relationship to them, and was*

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<sup>3</sup>Karl Marx, Introduction, *Grundrisse: Foundation of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1973) 84.



*at the same time, since it was the combination of one class over against another, not only a complete illusory community, but a new fetter as well. In the real community, the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association."*<sup>4</sup>

We are concerned with the enclosure of the world, which must be understood in our time as a very particular loss of human community. Using a Marxist historical perspective, I will attempt to characterize the loss of community in our own time as effectuated and maintained by the economic, material structure of capital. Capitalism's evolution has both economic and cultural aspects, but a basic Marxist tenet, however, is that the socio-cultural formations through which life is expressed do not develop independently of the material economic structure. "Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness," Marx and Engels argue in *The German Ideology*, "Have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life."<sup>5</sup>

As an historical process, the material structure of capital produces social and cultural expressions through which it dialectically mediates its own development. Of significance to us in this dialectical evolution is the status of consciousness, the place where the process transpires subjectively. Marxist theory attends to both the economic and social dimensions of consciousness. It sees consciousness as a concrete reality that comes to itself through its own evolving economic and social structures. This is the domain of ideology.

## II

### *Ideology and Human Consciousness*

Ideology is consciousness, although we tend to look at ideology as a set of discrete conceptions meant to persuade or deceive — conceptions which stand along side other sets of ideas which are non-ideological. A Marxist analysis of consciousness, however, reveals that ideology is more insidious.

*Life as Ideology.* "The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they are effective, produce materially, and are active under definite material limits, presuppositions and

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<sup>4</sup>Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. R. Paschal (New York: International Publishers, 1969) 74-5. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>5</sup>Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 14-15.



conditions independent of their will."<sup>6</sup> This quote from *The German Ideology* tells us that under conditions independent of their will, individuals are constituted *in life* to exist in a *definite* way. This *definitive coercion* is caused by the material structure, and is nothing other than that structure's expression as the concrete life of individuals: social consciousness, the species-being of people, is fundamentally a lived ideology.

The basic consciousness of modern life flows out of people's material behavior. Under capitalism's economic mode of production, this material behavior inverts the mutual and conscious common life of people which would otherwise flow from their shared material activity.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the lived material activity of people under capital is a lacuna, a real absence of a "living" community. Life as ideology therefore indicates that before the relations and conditions of modern life appear to consciousness as *natural* realities on a social and cultural level, they *are* already expressions of the given ideology which constitutes people's lives. Whatever socio-cultural ideas or experiences that might appear within this ideological life-matrix are not independent standpoints from which to comprehend something *about* this life-matrix, rather they are *part of* it. The given material structure of capitalism gives the general form and context to the particular experiences of all individuals. It is first in this fundamental way that social consciousness (the actual existing life of individuals) functions ideologically to maintain individuals in an alienation of their own making — an alienation which by another process they will imagine is their natural state.<sup>8</sup>

*The Ideology About Life.* But there is also an ideology about life. Marx calls this *mental production*. Various *means* are needed to produce ideas, and historically they were initially recognized as the *private* property of those who also owned the means of material production. The *private* sites of mental production are found across the broad topography of civil society. These sites include, among other things, institutions such as schools, courts, churches; but also fashion, manners, dialect and accent; as well as aesthetic artifacts and the places that house or perform them. Ownership of these sites permitted the hegemonic bourgeoisie to organize people's individual experiences, and thus the ideological consciousness about those experiences, around their own universal dominance.

Eventually commodities themselves became the sites of the social organization of people's conscious experiences through the purchase of the identities which they promise to deliver. Like the bourgeois sites before them, commodities obstruct the

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<sup>6</sup>Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 13.

<sup>7</sup>Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 14.

<sup>8</sup>The term "imagination" provides a way of describing both the objective content which the individual socially confronts, and the "conscious" appropriation of that content in a way which preserves the individual's concrete (false) identity with it. The term is helpful for distinguishing the ideological conceptions which serve the interests of the class or formation in power without affirming them. Here one is induced by various hegemonic devices to accept as natural the life which capitalism inverts.

concrete consciousness that existing consciousness is itself capital's logical evolution expressed as concrete social life. Marxism is hesitant, therefore, to accept an epoch's, or even an individual's understanding about itself. For given the fact that actual life is a lived ideology, the particular ideologies about that life rarely reveal the truth that it is false, but generally affirm the fallacy that it is true.

*The Enclosure of Consciousness.* If self-consciousness is understood as the *lived* experience of truth, i.e. if it is true in practice and not merely in thought, then true self-consciousness is not possible under capitalism for two reasons. First it implies a consciousness free of the very reality which constitutes it as consciousness. Second, it implies the active removal of the material reality by which it acts before it acts to remove it. By contrast, we know that true self-consciousness would experience itself as a *living* consciousness arising from authentic community and manifesting itself in the concrete objective existence of every human subject. The *practical* dilemma of Marxism is how to bring this situation about since it seems to require as a precondition the actual transformation it strives to achieve. The historical ontology of Marxism nevertheless manifests an analytical integrity whose honesty about the human condition helps us to see not only how utterly *enclosed* and deprived of *original freedom* is the human world in which communal unity as a lived experience is impossible, but also how incapable people are of redeeming themselves from this situation because of the human condition which they have established for themselves.

### III

#### *The Disappearance of Community*

We must now consider the details of the state of consciousness in our time. Our first step in this analysis will be to consider how community disappeared as a *living* reality. It is axiomatic to say that "social relations" are always to be found where humans live and interrelate; but Marx's point is that where *specific* social relations make human communal life function in non-human, thing-like ways (rather than in directly personal ways), as is the case under capitalist means and relations of production, community "dis-appears" into objective laws, and the concrete individual, being a reflection of these social relations, "dis-appears" as an "individual-in-community" to re-appear as a "private," "independent," and "indifferent" individual whose own subjectivity even to itself is experienced in a thing-like way and is expressed as "the pursuit of private interests."<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that the independent individual in fact lives out

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<sup>9</sup>"Private interest" is an economic term which indicates the belief that every individual seeks and produces his or her own means to life. Marx approaches the term as an indication of the fate or status of the modern individual as it relates to its community in the satisfaction of its life needs. Working from the historical premise that the individual is the creation of the community and finds its means to life satisfied through relations of dependence within that community, Marx observes that capitalist society is founded upon the disintegration of personal relationships of dependence in the production of life needs. What is left is the abstract reified relations created by exchange. Since this is the social reality under the capitalist arrangement of the means of production, and since the individual is a product of its society, "private interest" for Marx points to the alienated aloneness of the modern individual who really becomes the

its life free of dependence on others, or that it is actually free of interpersonal connections in the pursuit of its private interests, but rather that the modern individual "appears" to itself and to its society to live "independently" because real communal relations have been displaced and taken over by the way in which material needs are produced and satisfied under capitalism. Real community is inverted under capital in such a way that what is essentially human activity appears as something alien and non-human to the very people engaged in it: "His activity, therefore, appears as torment, his own creation as a force alien to him, his wealth as poverty, the *essential bond* connecting him with other men as something unessential so that the separation from other men appears as his true existence."<sup>10</sup>

Capitalist society is actually "community-by-other-means", or "community-as-absence-of-community", and Marx likens it to an inter-human lacuna. On one side of the gap, he sees only independent individuals pursuing their private interests indifferent to the life activities of others; on the other side, Marx observes a common social product being produced which, while satisfying their means to life, prevents individuals from experiencing their interconnected activities as the constitutive ingredients of human community. Marx summarized the social situation of modern humanity in this way: "The mutual and universal dependence of individuals who remain indifferent to one another constitutes the social network that binds them together. This social coherence is expressed in *exchange value*, in which alone each individual's activity or his product becomes an activity or a product for him."<sup>11</sup>

### *Three Replacements of Living Community*

*Money.* Under the bourgeois mode of production, *money* replaces the *product of labor* in its role as the personal means by which one individual mediates himself/herself in the mutual creation of *living community*. Money is the reified remains of what otherwise would have been a developing, "living" human community. Money, then, can be viewed as the individual's share in the general form of the inversion of authentic common life and as the direct means of incorporating the individual into the alienated relations of a "non-living" community.<sup>12</sup> This definition of money points to the lacuna which is modern human life: the worker does not receive a *human* and *social* nature — a communal life — as a return for labor. Instead, wage-money becomes the means whereby displaced communal relations are maintained and reproduced by the individual as it undertakes the satisfaction of its life needs as an activity of private

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representative of this abstract community. The objective laws of this opposed world — the thing-like appearances of actual social relations — are the commands which structure and motivate the individual's "private interests."

<sup>10</sup>Marx, *Excerpt-Notes*, 272.

<sup>11</sup>Marx, *Grundrisse*, 66.

<sup>12</sup>Marx, *Grundrisse*, 66.



interest. Money "appears" where individual and community should appear, negotiating the interpersonal absence that surrounds the modern individual, an absence that constitutes the community-by-other-means which defines modern social relations.

*Value.* Under the capitalist mode of production, all products, if they are to become commodities, have *value* added to them over and above their essential *use-value*.<sup>13</sup> Marx argues that products under the capitalist mode of production can only have *value* added to them by *abstract labor*, i.e. by human labor from which both the *particularity* of *this* individual's labor and the *universality* of this laborer's *living community* have been removed.<sup>14</sup> Without the context of a *living community*, and without the *particular meaning* of *this* individual being expressed within the context of a living community, "all that these things (i.e. commodities) now tell us is, that human labor-power has been expended in their production, that human labor is embodied in them. When looked at as crystals of this *social substance*, common to them all, they are — Values."<sup>15</sup>

*Commodities.* The *value* added to commodities by the capitalist mode of production, then, represents two realities at one and the same time: the *absent particularity* of *this* individual's labor; and the *absent universality* of the individual's *living community*. Now if *value* is the reality of these two absences, then commodities are expressions of value's evolution to this generalization, for value's gradual depletion of subjective *identity-in-community* is at the same time its own self-construction as an objective totality. At any given historical moment, then, commodities indicate the degree to which *identity-in-community* has been objectivized by value. In *value*-terms, the individual (concretely defined as an *identity-in-community*) is not only a continuous creation of value, indicating the degree to which value has advanced to its objective generalization, but the individual is also the effective agent of that advancement since, through its activities, it becomes the means for value to complete the logic of its historical trajectory. It is to this universalized *value*, created by *abstract labor* at the moment of production and visibly represented by every commodity, that the individual returns through *particular* acts of purchase and consumption.

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<sup>13</sup>"Commodities come into the world in the shape of use-values, articles, or goods, such as iron, linen, corn, etc. This is their plain, homely, bodily form. They are, however, commodities, only because they are something two-fold, both objects of utility, and, at the same time, depositories of value. They manifest themselves therefore as commodities, or have the form of commodities, only in so far as they have two forms, a physical or natural form and a value-form." Karl Marx, *Capital, I*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 312-13.

<sup>14</sup>"Neither can it any longer be regarded as the product of the labor of the joiner, the mason, the spinner, or of any other definite kind of productive labor. Along with the *useful qualities* (i.e. use-value) of the products themselves, we put *out of sight* (the disappearance of the individual-in-community) both the *useful character* of the various kinds of labor embodied in them (i.e. *this* individual's subjective skills as identity-markers in his/her community), and the concrete forms of that labor (i.e. the *particularity* of individual labor); there is nothing left but what is common to them all; all are reduced to one and the same sort of labor, human labor in the abstract." Marx, *Capital I* in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 305. Emphasis and parentheses are mine.

<sup>15</sup>Marx, *Capital, I* in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 305. Emphases and parentheticals are mine.



#### IV

##### *The Disappearance of the Individual into the Community of Commodities*

The inner logic of the capitalist revolution created individual life and continually re-establishes the conditions of its existence. As this logic unfolded in the context of what it had concretized, it gradually established the commodity form as the constitutive condition of society, and thus of the individual who was unavoidably drawn to it because increasingly it determined individual needs as well as the universal means for satisfying them. Under the spell of this evolution, the modern individual began to exhibit a change in its historical appearance.<sup>16</sup> The fashions, manners, and habitual preferences of the bourgeoisie began to disappear as distinctly bourgeois properties in the consumption of popularly advertised commodities. The concrete bourgeois paradigm was taken over by a rhetoric about it that attached to and accompanied the universal dominance of the commodity. As the old bourgeois individual faded from public view through the purchase and consumption of commodities, a new individual emerged, the standard or mass individual, the consumer.

As I have said, every commodity as a repository of value intrinsically represents a loss of individuality and community, and so the loss of identity-in-community. The rhetoric of commodities, however, promises to return this lost identity-in-community to the individual who purchases them. Jackson Lears in his *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*, outlines the essential role played by American advertising in this process of acquiring back identity through commodity purchase and consumption. Under capitalism's creation of the commodity, use-value was separated from value by the same capitalist dynamic that separated the individual from its universal and living community. Advertising re-focused the individual's need to restore its lost identity onto the commodity, which, through the addition of value, had become the reality of lost community. Lears quotes many contributors to the advertising trade magazines of the time whose statements demonstrate a recognition of the separation of use-value from the universal value of the commodity, and argue for the promotion of value, and its latent identity-in-community, over use-value. Lears summarizes this trend with a quote from a leading advertising authority of the time: an "economy of symbolism [should] surround the product with condensed clusters of words and images (to give) it *symbolic* as well as *utilitarian* value". "Each of us," he quotes another as saying, "has something to sell, and just because it is *invisible and intangible* is no reason why it is not real." Lears observes that in the 1890s and early 1900s "the

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<sup>16</sup>"Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange, and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party in Social and Political Philosophy: Readings from Plato to Gandhi*, eds. John Somerville and Ronald Santoni (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1963) 349-50.

manufacturer correctly sensed that advertising was not about the things themselves, but about *the representation of things*." He concludes: "Through the mass circulation of visual aids to fantasy, [national advertising] promoted perpetual, unfulfillable longings, and focused those longings on commodities." They were unfulfillable because they were at root the individual's own loss of identity-in-community, and every commodity available for purchase represented both that loss and the possibility of its commodified recovery.<sup>17</sup>

Once this process began, it became impossible to acquire a *living* identity in any other way. *Living* — the intangible universal present in every commodity — became, in the rhetoric of the ad, the contradictory command to "be one's self" and to conform to capitalist consumptive behavior. The promise of the ad to acquire a *living* identity-in-community was in practical effect a lure to conform to the existing structures and processes of capitalism. *Living* as offered by the ad and delivered by the commodity was the consequence of being unable to escape this regime. Eventually, advertisements made explicit the fact that individual identity — personality — had been usurped by things. Lears notes that "in search of language to characterize the aura they sought, trade press writers resorted to the idiom of 'vitality' or 'personality'." "Every product has its personality," one commentator wrote in 1910. The commodity came to life — it had acquired the personality of the individual who had lost his or her identity to it, and who sought to regain his or her personality from it. But having been alienated from his or her own product, the individual could only buy back the universal, standard personality of the commodity. Individuals became recognizable to other individuals and to themselves only according to the objective mass of things.<sup>18</sup> The solitary individual had finally been integrated into a new community of life and of identity, the community of commodities.

When individuals encounter *value* in commodities in this way, they not only meet what they have brought about, they also meet what they have become, namely, an objective identity expressive of the community of coherence which *value* creates among all commodities. In a sense, in this journey of return to *value*, the individual is rewarded for the subjective deprivations inflicted upon it during its maturation as the creator of *value*. Its reward is incorporation into an objective consciousness about itself, for through the purchase and consumption of commodities, the individual becomes the objective expression of its own subjective disappearance, a rhetorical site where *value*'s various identities come to articulation.

Now organized around the centrality of the commodity form, individual identity becomes particularized as an abstract universal standard recognizable and acquirable by all, an identity whose diverse rhetorical representations express not the experience

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<sup>17</sup>Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (Basic Books: New York, 1994) 200, 205-8, 215, 274, 289, 291. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>18</sup>Lears, *Fables*, 108, 207, 289-91.

of a single dominating class, not the experience of single individuals, but the universal *value* which is the essence of every commodity — individuality without difference. In this totalizing abstraction, the commodity form, by its own inner logic, closed the communal gap, of which it was both cause and absence, by filling it with individuals whom it once created but who are now no longer there.

### The Enclosure of the Upper Room

The enclosure of the individual within a community of commodities describes the concrete world of our time. Contemporary American life is a *lived* forgetfulness that true human individuality can only arise from the mutuality of living community. This commodified world continually generates the fear that acquired identities, the only kind permitted, will not last, a fear which its inducements to greater consumption can only aggravate, but never dispel. In its forgetfulness and fear, contemporary consciousness has nonetheless acquired a true perspective on itself: there is nothing outside of what it sees and hears because there simply is no *outside*.

There is, however, a perspective of the world which the lived unity of the upper room affords. This is not only knowledge of the world but **life for** the world, and it comes from above. True consciousness of the world's situation (i.e. consciousness that is true in practice and in thought) cannot, by the world's own admission, come from the world. It can only from above: *The One who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth is earthly, and he speaks on an earthly plane.* (Jn 3:31ff.) Once a person enters the upper room of oneness and life, once a person is *begotten from above* (Jn 3:3-8), that person acquires the perspective of knowledge and life that is the Word's own.

The truthfulness of the perspective which the upper room provides of the world is a result of its redemptive unity, the historical teleology of the love of Father and Son. In the upper room, the Word testifies to what he has seen and heard from above. (Jn 3:31ff) Jesus entrusts this message of unity to his disciples as a *life to be lived* (Jn 17:8) since their reception of this message incorporates them into the *living unity* of Father and Son. (Jn 17:22-23) As a unity begotten of the Father and Son's love in time, the oneness of the disciples offers the world a true witness (*Whoever accepts his testimony certifies that God is truthful.* Jn 3:33), first about its enclosure, and then about freedom from the enclosure of forgetfulness and fear: *...We are talking about what we know, we are testifying to what we have seen... If you do not believe when I tell you about earthly things, how are you to believe when I tell you about those of heaven?* (Jn 3:11-12)



## Enclosure

Wherever the church gathers, especially the church at Eucharist, there is the upper room. The return of the disciples from Emmaus indicates this. Upon their return to the upper room "They were greeted with, 'The Lord has been raised! It is true! He has appeared to Simon'." The Emmaus disciples were greeted with the church's basic and earliest Easter proclamation. And to this proclamation they joined and identified their own experience of the living Jesus in the Eucharist: "Then they recounted what had happened on the road and how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread." (Lk 24:33-35) The juxtaposition of these two resurrection accounts in the context of the Easter upper room equates them.

The church, like the disciples of Emmaus, is on the road in the company of Jesus who speaks to it and explains (mediates) himself to it on its way through the world with the proclamation of life. But as it courses through human history, the church does not forget the upper room. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we have the clear sense that things begin and return to the upper room: Pentecost, the choosing of the deacons, the Council of Jerusalem, the missionary activities of Paul all have *reference to the apostolic upper room*. In its historical activity the church never forgets the apostolic upper room, for it needs as much to see and hear the oneness and unity of the Word's historical presence as it needs to taste it in the breaking of the bread. And so the church preserves the upper room for itself, even as it preserves the Eucharist for itself, not just in memory but in fact. It encloses the upper room *from* the world *for itself* in order to have a relationship with its own identity — one as true as its Eucharistic identity — as it travels along the road with the message of life. The disciples of Emmaus who meet the *living* Easter Jesus in the Eucharist meet the *living* proclamation "He is risen! It is true!" in the Easter unity of the enclosed upper room.

Dominic, the apostolic preacher of the Word, knew the need for communion with the oneness and unity which he proclaimed as life for the world. So Dominic formed in Prouille an upper room whose apostolic oneness was the dwelling place of Father and Son, the community of God enclosed in a human community to be a redemptive sign that forgiveness is the way out of the world's enclosure. He placed his upper room at the heart of his ministry to the Cathars who had accepted the enclosure of the human world as an unchangeable given and whose own unity was not a means of redeeming it in themselves or others but of leaving it behind. For this reason we do not view Dominic's frequent visits to the nuns as violations of enclosure but rather as its exercise, just as Paul's return to the upper room of Jerusalem opened its apostolic unity to all the gentiles, thereby opening the enclosure of the world to the forgiveness and freedom of the upper room.



*In the Enclosure of the Upper Room*

*Peace and Forgiveness.* Every Dominican nun is called to real peace and forgiveness by the Shepherd who, in the upper room, knows and calls each by name. The shepherd calls his own to **his** life, i.e. to the oneness he historically shares with the Father through the peace and forgiveness which is the life of his flock. Every nun within the sheepfold of the upper room has the evangelical right to be living this forgiveness **for** and **from** all others in the community where the risen Word calls her name aloud. In the upper room, forgiveness is the *beginning* in each that *ends* in peace for all. This **is** the Easter circle of love Jesus delivers through his flock — his evangelical passage through human history with his redemptive life seen and heard in our time in each nun's forgiveness and in the communal life which is her peace.

*Dialectic of Stability and Change.* The dialectic of our present world produces change without freedom. The world changes out of its own activity according to a logic which it does not control and from which it cannot be different. There is no teleology of the Fall. One Marxist commentator expresses this ultimate purposelessness in this way: "There is no preconceived grand plan to be fulfilled exactly; there is no end to the development; there is only a direction that is alterable and altered by men depending upon the degree of their awareness, including self-awareness. In Marx's materialism the starting point is not the atom as in old materialism, nor abstract being as such as in Hegel; in fact there is not a strict starting point at all, because 'every being must always be an objective being, a propulsive and propelled part of a concrete complex'."<sup>19</sup>

The upper room does not change *historically* because its *living* unity is its freedom from the contemporary world's historical randomness and purposeless identity. The flock of the upper room is different from those who have yet to hear the voice of their shepherd because they do not change *out of their own activity* but **are changed** by the Word who recreates them as **one**. The Word's passage to the Father through the upper room both reveals and enacts the plan of love which includes in its historical life the forgiveness which is the way to freedom. All of the world's activity cannot realize a community whose origin and purpose is the love of Father and Son.

*Contemplation.* In the world, contemplation is what remains of human subjectivity under capitalism's regime since the meaningful activity which would otherwise produce identity-in-community has been objectified by the labor process and set up against the individual as something alien and thing-like. In the world, the person contemplates its own living activity, under the commodified forms determined by capital, as a longing for and dialogue with an unrecognizable self. One surrenders to the world

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<sup>19</sup>Bela Kiralyfalvi, *The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975) 26.

as one has made it. But this surrender is only repeated loss, and what is recovered is a de-humanized set of commodified identities that speak not the life of the self or its subjective community, but only the lifelessness of things.

The enclosed contemplation of the upper room is the personal encounter with the Word who has contextualized himself and his beloved in the unity of her community. To hear the voice of the shepherd is to share a *living* dialogue with all, a dialogue which shows itself in the living forgiveness which each nun receives because having received, she offers. Contemplation is thus an activity of the Word's life, not a passivity which circumstance enforces as a substitution for the loss of identity-in-community. In the enclosed upper room, the identity uniquely desired and given by the Word to each nun is at the same time an identity-in-the-community of the Word. To surrender to the *living unity* of the upper room is to hear the Word uniquely calling each by name. The personal consolations of such intimate union with the Word are objectively confirmed by seeing Jesus alive in the oneness which all live.

*Suffering and Death.* As I have said, in the world human fear is generated by suffering and death, the loss of meaning in the context of meaning, the loss of identity in a community which produces human meaning. Suffering and death especially defeat the commodified identities of our time because these identities are particularly fragile and impermanent: their given meanings pass more quickly into insignificance and thus must be purchased and consumed with greater rapidity and less depth — to the greater loss of subjectivity and community. Identity acquired in the community of commodities aggravates the very fears it promises the consumer it will dispel.

In the enclosure of the upper room, the fullness of life is lived since the life that is lived there has as its beginning and end the *beginning and end which is the living Word* who transversed suffering and death in order to live historically in the upper room in unity with the Father. The *glory* of Jesus was his suffering and death: *Father, the hour has come! Give glory to your Son that your Son may give glory to you...* (Jn 17:1; 12:23-24) Jesus revealed this glory — or better, this glory could only be seen and heard — in the upper room since his return to the Father **is** life seen and heard, first and always, in the unity of the upper room. Those who fall to suffering and death in the midst of your Easter enclosure are not disassociated from the process of the Word's unity, they are not removed from the oneness in which Jesus suffers, dies, and comes to life with the Father since you **are** that oneness. In fact, because of your unity, they become epiphanies of the glory which is Jesus's own, and, like him, reveal that the beginning and end **is** life in your midst. As a return for the gift of life which your unity bestows on them, the suffering and dying in your communities make visible the glory which is the Word's own, and allow his *living prayer* to the Father to be heard: *Father, all those you gave me I would have in my company where I am, to see this glory of mine which is your gift to me, because of the love you bore me before the world began.* (Jn 17:24)

### III

#### *The World Comes to the Enclosure of the Upper Room*

Enclosure is Christ being lifted up. The church sets its upper room apart as a sign in the desert to itself as it makes its passage to the promised land of oneness with the Father and Son. Jesus says in reference to the uplifting which is your enclosed life: *When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.* (Jn 3:14-15, 8:28; 12:32) The world necessarily, therefore, comes *directly* to your gate, for all people look for the peace and forgiveness — for the freedom — which only the historical unity of Father and Son can provide, the unity which the community of your sheepfold makes visible as a voice for all to hear. Your unity heals those bitten by the venom of contemporary identities. It orients them on the trajectory of the Word's return to union with the Father by exercising peace and forgiveness in their behalf, a ministry which flows from the peace and forgiveness you give to one another. This ministry of the upper room puts you at the heart of the Dominican apostolate of our day, for you make one the bread evangelically broken by the friars' proclamation that Jesus is our peace and forgiveness.

Finally, your unity unites you with all enclosed religious, indeed with all apostolic communities — Menonites, Shakers, Amish, Taize, etc. — who with you share the eschatological expectation and joy that to know Jesus and to live his life with others is to be at the beginning of what is already the end, the transformation of the whole world in the love of Father and Son. ✠

# UNDERSTANDING ENCLOSURE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

A RADIANT CENTER OF CHARITY — AT THE HEART OF THE HOLY PREACHING

*ENCLOSURE: 'The Diligent Search for God' in the Context of LCM.*<sup>1</sup>

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## OUTLINE

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#### II. ENCLOSURE: LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

##### AN EDUCATED GUESS

1. Levels of Responsibility
2. Yesterday Today and . . .

### CONCLUSION

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<sup>1</sup> The title is from LCM, the Constitutions of the Dominican Nuns, 14, 35.I; the sub-title is from the description of enclosure found in the unofficial reports of the Synod on the Consecrated Life.



## **INTRODUCTION**

Unofficial reports of the discussions which took place at the Synod on the Consecrated Life (October, 1994) contain four points concerning monastic enclosure.<sup>2</sup>

1. The value and significance of enclosure are to be more strongly affirmed. These are separation from the world, solitude and silence, which are means of seeking God more diligently.
2. Revision of *Venite Seorsum* norms (CRIS, August 15, 1969), so that the kind of enclosure which corresponds to the nature and charism of each institute would be expressed in conditions proper to the culture of our times.
3. Considering carefully the diversity of monastic families which already have different forms of enclosure, the wishes of those who desire to observe a stricter enclosure are to be considered.
4. It is to be left to the prudent judgement of the major superior (prioress) what are the just and sufficient reasons for which one may derogate from the prescriptions on enclosure, without having to refer to the bishop every time.

I have used these four points as a way of organizing my thoughts in this paper. The first two, the value and significance of monastic enclosure itself and its correspondence to the nature and charism of each institute in conditions proper to the culture of our times, are the most important from a conceptual point of view. The determination of these will give us a basis for choosing the degree of strictness we wish to adopt and guidelines for a prioress to aid her prudential judgement concerning dispensations.

## **I. ENCLOSURE: THE CONCEPT**

### **ITS VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **1. In the Light of God**

Monastic enclosure is like the setting of a ring which exists not for itself, but for the sake of the jewels which are held securely within it. By definition a ring-setting is strong enough to support what it is designed to contain. And enclosure is a strong support for all aspects of the contemplative life. It presupposes a community of persons committed to living harmoniously in the monastery, intent upon seeking God with one mind and heart in Him. This harmonious living is not based simply on the mere fact of living together with a common purpose, sharing common interests. These are present and important of course. But above and beyond this, in a totally different sphere, it is the love of Christ that gathers us together: first, his love for each of us and then, empowered by his love, our love for him and for one another in him. In the poetic

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<sup>2</sup> e.g., Eoin de Bhaldraith, OCist. "The Synod of Bishops and Nuns' Enclosure," *Religious Life Review*, 34, July-August 1995, pp. 200-204. This direction has since been verified by *Vita Consecrata* 59, which refers to Canon 667.4 and Proposition 22.4 of the Synod on the Consecrated Life.

words of St. Catherine of Siena: *You shall find the source of charity in the side of the crucified Christ. Approach, enter and remain in this sweet dwelling. Abide in the holy and sweet love of God. Love one another.*<sup>3</sup> It is in him that we receive a heart transplant, so to speak, to love others with the very love of God.

Jesus came to show us 'in human form' what THE TRIUNE GOD IS LIKE: CONSTANTLY OPEN TO THE OTHER IN SELFLESS LOVE. This love of Christ is what can effect the self-transcendence so essential for a communion modeled on the communion within the Trinity, making of the monastic community a *God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the Risen Lord*,<sup>4</sup> a radiant center of charity.

A helpful device for examining the value and significance of enclosure could be the Christianized principle of emanation and return which St. Thomas used in his theology to locate each created thing in its proper place in the scale of being. This will enable us to consider enclosure in terms of its highest causality so that its reason for existing can be fully shown in the light of God, its Source and its Goal.

There is a radical realism in looking at the *raison d'être* of enclosure in the light of God, its Source and Goal. This is what distinguishes the withdrawal from the world practiced by Christian monks and nuns as a diligent search for God in solitude and silence, from that which artists and scholars might create for the sake of perfecting their talent and thought, or that which an eccentric or malcontent might create as an escape from what is deemed insupportable in the persons and environment about them. It is this theocentricity that distinguishes Christian monastic enclosure from the spiritual discipline of those non-Christian monasticisms which make no reference to God.

In this same *exitus-reditus* schema each individual person is also seen in relation to God, from Whom we come forth and towards Whom we make a return journey. Monastic enclosure becomes a means of assisting us in our diligent search for God, in our return to Him.

The English word 'diligent,' is derived from the latin 'diligere' which means 'to love,' and the diligent search for God has the characteristic quality of the earnestness of love. God is love, He first diligently searches for us, as it were, and places within our hearts a desire to pursue a search for him with our whole life. St. Augustine sheds light on what we mean when we say 'a diligent search for God.'

When day after day I had to hear 'Where is your God?' my tears were my food every day, and I pondered day and night on what I had heard . . . And so I too sought for my God, so that if it were possible I might not only believe in Him but also catch some glimpse of Him . . . I did not find Him; [But] He has on earth, a place in which to shelter. His shelter on

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to the novices of the Order at Santa Maria de Monte Oliveto.

<sup>4</sup> St. Basil, Short Rule, Q. 225: PG 31, 1231.

earth is His Church, still on her pilgrim way. And it is here where we must seek Him, . . .  
God's shelter on earth is the men who believe in Him.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. In the Light of Christ and his Body the Church

Augustine prefaces this comment by saying that the search for God is not just that of an individual but is that of the Church, 'those who believe in God,' the body of Christ on earth. Monastic enclosure reflects the whole Church united with Christ as he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to pray and to engage in battle with the ruler of this world; and Christ as he withdraws to pray to his Father, to whose will he was totally submitted, ultimately even unto death on a Cross. *Venite Seorsum* expresses it this way:

To withdraw into the desert is for the Christian tantamount to associating oneself more intimately with Christ's Passion. It enables one, in a very special way, to share in the paschal mystery and in the passage of Our Lord from this world to the heavenly homeland. It was precisely on this account that monasteries were founded, situated as they are in the very heart of the mystery of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

We find this Scriptural theme of withdrawing into the desert with Christ in the Book of Revelation which portrays the Church as the woman taking flight into the wilderness, where she has *a place prepared by God* (Rev. 12:8). One Scripture scholar comments: "This becomes a Christian synthesis of primeval conflict situations televising, as it were, the cosmic victory of God's kingly power."<sup>7</sup> God said to the Israelites in the Exodus: "In the wilderness you have seen how the Lord your God bore you as a man carries his son. . . I went before you in the way to seek you out *a place to pitch your tents*, in fire by night, and in the cloud by day" (Dt.1:31, 33). The Exodus and the Paschal Mystery of Christ are seen as type and fulfillment.

Christian mysticism gives us a wonderful expression: *the desert of the Godhead*, a metaphor for that sacred place of mysterious encounter between the utterly hidden and transcendent God and the person who has sought Him. It is closely related to the radical quest for God in the 'desert' of the monastery. To withdraw from the world and go into monastic enclosure as the desert of the Godhead involves a paradox like the one Jesus gave us when he said: "Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will find it." To enter the desert of the Godhead is to go as Church, taking flight into the desert wherein one has *a place prepared by God*. Here is the great paradox: in that mysterious solitary encounter between God and the person, where everything else has been left behind, everything is found transformed and redeemed in the God who is encountered. The desert of the Godhead

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<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, psalm 41 (42).

<sup>6</sup> VS 1.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Homer Giblin, SJ, *The Book of Revelation, The Open Book of Prophecy*, Good News Studies; vol. 34; "A Michael Glazier Book" (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), pp. 122-130.

describes the fulfillment of the Church itself, and in a striking way, even a paradigmatic way, of monastic life as a diligent search for God in silence and solitude.

A contemporary theologian offers this insight:

This is not private, existentialist solitude, for it is most profound community in and with Christ, just as Christ's solitude is always — even in his dereliction on the cross — community in and with the Father. But such solitude in origin can become so abysmal as to occlude the experience of community. The Church is the pure outpouring of the Lord; the Christian the pure outpouring of Christ and the Church. Bearing this duplex community one advances towards a community to be regenerated: but goes one's way in solitude.<sup>8</sup>

If one believes that the salvation of the entire world, came about from the solitary, fixed place of the Cross firmly planted on Calvary, on a portion of the earth measuring about one square foot, then is it not possible to believe that monastic enclosure, limiting as it does the geographical space of a person's earthly life, can be an authentic and fruitful place for a Christian to follow the Way who is Jesus Christ, participating in his kenosis, his total openness to the other: to the Father and to each of us, in selfless love.

One who enters a monastery has open before her the possibility of receiving from the Father the power to surrender her life completely, a senseless and incomprehensible act in purely human terms. This voluntary powerlessness awaits transformation and regeneration by the Spirit of Christ breathed out over the chaos of our lives.

This is a radical Gospel ideal that no one would venture to undertake without God's ever-present help. We see the wisdom in our Dominican tradition of asking at each stage of our commitment, for the mercy of God and our community! Pope John Paul II at the opening of the Synod said: *Each of us has heard this call: 'Follow me!' — an invitation that carried empowerment within . . . Its power is derived from the One who issued it.* I would add that when we do not draw from that empowerment, we sink as we try to walk across the water toward the Lord.

## CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

What is meant by expressing enclosure, a perennial element of the contemplative life, in conditions proper to contemporary culture?

### 1. Conversation From a Gospel Viewpoint

The conversation with contemporary culture we have entered into in this assembly is not a capitulation to it, nor an entering into compromise with it. A conversation in the

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, Church and World, trans. A.V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 30.



sense we wish use it presupposes that our part of the dialogue comes out of a lifetime of conversation with God, with His Self-revelation in Scripture, in Salvation History and most importantly in Jesus Christ and his Gospel. It is from this ground that we attempt to confront the truth and falsehood within our culture.

In our Dominican Constitutions, allusion to what is incompatible with our vocation is indicated in many passages by phrases such as: withdrawing from the empty preoccupations and illusions of the world (1.III); forgetting what lies behind (1.III); maintaining withdrawal from the world by enclosure and silence (1.V); following Jesus as he withdraws into solitude (35); withdrawing from the world in fact and in spirit (36); etc.

This is traditional monastic terminology for indicating whatever is incompatible with monastic life in any given culture, whatever interferes with that diligent search for God which should characterize life in the monastery. Today those particular aspects of our culture which give us our counter-cultural stance can be summed up in phrases such as: consumerism, the cult of the individual, the exaltation of the human subject, reductionism, cynicism, methodic doubt, permissiveness, relevance, the quick-fix. You can perhaps add others.

## **2. New Challenges and Old**

There are relatively new challenges to withdrawal from the world which did not exist when the great monastic rules and literature were written. Think of the implications inherent in the telephone, the radio, television, video and audio tapes, the availability and massive output of the printed word, giving easy access to newspapers and light reading, and more recently the computer and all the information and diversion immediately available. There is a constant bombardment of the senses, making it difficult for the contemporary person to be silent and to interiorize. Doctors and dentists used to come to the monastery and now very few will do this thus necessitating more reasons for leaving the enclosure.

Clearly these are not in themselves negative realities, many of them are wonderful developments. The question is: how are they to be used or not used by contemporary persons who embrace the contemplative way of life in the Church? Our discussions may show that this question contains the greater number of practical issues for us concerning enclosure as we attempt to provide principles to guide us in their regard.

Perhaps this is a good place to mention older challenges, perennial ways the human spirit has of avoiding what can be difficult to sustain in an enclosed situation, of filling that void left by withdrawal from the world, with things other than the Lord. History shows us that boredom and restlessness have often been the source of difficulty for monks and nuns. We have the extreme examples of such aberrations in the legendary gyrovagues. A more subtle expression takes the form of over-absorption in projects and a workaholic approach to assignments.

We can say and read very profound and beautiful things about our way of life and they are true. But most of our lives we know them in the dark light of faith and often we experience a real and painful struggle. The observance of enclosure is a helpful means with a very exalted purpose, but it is also a discipline and at times a difficult one. The Letter to the Hebrews advises us:

Perseverance is part of your training. . . For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:11)

### 3. The Synod and *Venite Seorsum*

These considerations are important background for weighing the implications of today's culture for enclosure. But let's proceed to what was meant by those who were present at the Synod on the Consecrated Life when they proposed that the norms of *Venite Seorsum* be revised in a way that will enable enclosure to be expressed in conditions proper to the culture of our time.<sup>9</sup>

I'll summarize a few of the concerns about the norms of *Venite Seorsum* that were voiced at the Synod. What is viewed as problematic seems to be largely a matter of the language in which the norms are expressed and the underlying attitude this conveys.

- a. The description of enclosure is couched in terminology more suggestive of a prison than of a house of prayer (doors kept locked, heavy iron mesh etc.) (3)
- b. The obligation to secure permission of the local Ordinary for leaving the enclosure does not correspond with the condition of women in the church and in society, as well as with a healthy subsidiarity. (7)
- c. The incongruity of specifying that heads of State with their retinue may enter the enclosure with no provision for a family member to visit a Sister who is sick in the infirmary and unable to come to the parlor. (8)
- d. A tone of reluctance to permit participation of nuns in meetings that truly benefit cloistered life. (12)
- e. Some incongruity in using the words 'grave obligation in conscience' concerning the law of enclosure in contrast to the current Code of Canon Law 1247 which refers simply to 'the obligation to take part in Sunday Mass.' Is the obligation of enclosure more serious than the Sunday Mass precept? (13)

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<sup>9</sup> A text was presented at the Synod by Abbot Bernardo Olivera, Argentinean Trappist General and by an Italian Trappistine, Abbess Christiana Piccardo superior of a Venezuelan monastery. After a few modifications the proposal received an almost unanimous vote. De Bhaldraith, OCist., "The Synod and Nuns' Enclosure," pp. 201-202.

f. 'The inspection at the time of the canonical visitation of the material cloister and of the book in which all the instances of entering and leaving the enclosure are to be noted' - details that seem to go against respect for persons and even common sense. (14)

g. The solemn exhortation to those 'who have both the right and the duty to supervise observance of the cloister laws' (bishops and male superior) to 'safeguard such observance with the greatest diligence' and the 'praise of the nuns who strictly observe separation from the world' seem excessive and may transform into an end what is only a means. (15)

h. A suggestion is made that it might be interesting to compare the underlying anthropology of *Venite Seorsum* with that presented later in *Marialis Cultis* (1974) or *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988).

## THE DOMINICAN CHARISM

Besides the issue of having enclosure expressed in conditions proper to contemporary culture, the Synod suggested that monastic life not be reduced to a common denominator but rather that varying circumstances and the specific charism of each Order be taken into account and allowance made for this in future enclosure legislation.

### 1. Interrelated Aspects

A charism, a supernatural gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit for building up the whole body of Christ, has a transcendent aspect which is difficult to articulate but there is also an incarnational aspect which lends itself, albeit imperfectly, to translation into human language.

I believe that one fundamental basis for a Dominican approach to enclosure is something I spoke of at some length in the paper for the prioresses' meeting: our view of the intrinsic goodness of creation, something so well articulated by St. Thomas.<sup>10</sup> Reflecting further about a specifically Dominican expression of monastic enclosure, five

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<sup>10</sup> "Toward a Theology of Enclosure," Dover, May, 1994: "The history of the original inspiration of our own Order influences our articulation of a theology of monastic enclosure with its distinctive Dominican aspects. One could say that we came into being as a response to a dualism that considers the material world as intrinsically evil. The first nuns gathered together in Prouille by Saint Dominic were converts from a form of dualism known as the Albigensian heresy. As such they would have been very sensitive to the truth of the goodness of all of God's creation. Our own Saint Thomas became an outstanding theological interpreter of this doctrine. We are heirs of these beginnings. Dominican monasticism can be more aptly considered a flight into God, who is Goodness itself, than a flight from the world. We find ourselves to be one with a wounded but intrinsically good creation and we work to cooperate with God in its healing, the work of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. We try to simplify our lives by eliminating those good things we don't need on our journey to God, and by not becoming selfishly attached to what we do need. It is only in this very importantly nuanced sense, coming out of our history, that we can speak of our Dominican monastic enclosure as being in some way a fuga mundi, a flight from the world."

other interrelated points emerge. Let me list these and then proceed to explain each of them.

1. Law in the Dominican tradition.
2. The formative value of the observance of enclosure in the context of the spirit of the Order.
3. The expression of enclosure in terms of the evangelization of the Word.
4. The prophetic and sign value of enclosure.
5. The tradition of enclosure from St. Dominic until now.

1. *Law in the Dominican tradition.* St. Dominic gave us a wonderful legacy in his life-giving concept of law which always ensures that our law never becomes an end in itself and, more importantly, that it retains sufficient built-in flexibility to provide for a vibrant sensitivity to the breath and power of the Holy Spirit. We are told that Dominic's radiant joy at perceiving for himself how well it worked became obvious during the last days of his life.<sup>11</sup>

I will mention some principles which accord with this Dominican approach not because I want to emphasize enclosure as a law per se, but because a Dominican view of human law is woven into the very fabric of our charism and spirituality.

(a) St. Thomas gives us the principle that *the perfection of a religious Order is measured primarily by its goal and secondarily by the effectiveness of its regular observance for accomplishing the goal.*<sup>12</sup> It is the 'why' of having monastic enclosure, and the 'how' it can best aid the 'why,' that concerns us. To highlight this someone suggested we pose this question: *What would our enclosure look like without the material forms, the walls and locked doors?* God, Who has revealed himself to us as love, is the total reason for its existence. Scripture captures this essence in eschatological terminology:

Jerusalem shall be inhabited like a village without walls for I myself will be a wall of fire all around and I myself will be the glory within it . . . for lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord (Zc 2:4-5). There is no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the almighty and the lamb (Rev 21:22). In him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

Without this fire, without this presence, enclosure is reduced to an absurdity. For us as Dominicans, the solemn celebration of the liturgy, especially the celebration of the

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<sup>11</sup> Marie-Humbert Vicaire, OP, The Genius of St. Dominic (Nagpur: Dominican Publications, 1990), 77-78.

<sup>12</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Iallae Q 97.



Eucharist, is the heart of our whole life and the chief source of its unity. (LCM 75) This special presence of the Lord, dwelling in our midst, assists us in preserving the continual remembrance of God. (LCM 74.IV)

Applying St. Thomas' principle that the determining factor when considering its regular observance is its effectiveness in accomplishing the purpose of the Order, our decisions concerning enclosure will spring from the conviction that it should be whatever most effectively supports our contemplative life. The degree of strictness is consequent upon this and is not in itself a determining factor.

(b) St. Thomas gives us another guiding principle when he explains that *law should be governed primarily by its usefulness to the common good, and following from this the good of individuals should serve the common good*.<sup>13</sup> The contemplative life and the Dominican Order, as charisms within the Church, are gifts of service bestowed by the Holy Spirit for building up the body of Christ.

As one visible dimension of a gift of the Holy Spirit, the monastic enclosure we are considering, can be judged in relation to its service to the common good: as a support for the individual Sister's contemplative life; as something that has a direct bearing upon the common good of the whole community, the quality of its contemplative life; and as something that has a bearing upon the common good that goes far beyond our walls, i.e. that of the entire Dominican Order and further, the common good of the entire Church.

Though our life in the monastery is a sharply focused journey of return to God, it is meant to be one of service bearing within it a vital and effective concern for the common good of the Order. Our contribution is described in our Constitutions:

There is a diversity of gifts, but one and the same Spirit, one charity, one mercy. The friars, sisters and laity of the Order are to 'preach the name of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world;' the nuns are to seek, ponder and call upon him in solitude so that the word proceeding from the mouth of God may not return to him empty, but may accomplish those things for which it was sent. (LCM 1.II)

It is important also to see how contemplative life, with its integral element and support of enclosure, is also a gift given for the common good of the entire ecclesial community. A theological view of the Church as communion enlarges our vision, giving us an understanding of the interrelationship and interdependence of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit. Vatican II emphasized that by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation and strengthened by the Eucharist, all the faithful share a common dignity and a universal call to holiness and that all cooperate in building up the one body of Christ, each in accordance with the received gift of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Iallae Q 90; IIaellae Q 47, a 10-11.

Speaking of the particular gift of service which contemplatives make in this common endeavor Pope John Paul II says in *Vita Consecrata*:

Communion in the Church is a gift of the Spirit who is present in the variety of charisms... Contemplatives offer the ecclesial community a singular testimony of the church's love for her Lord, and they contribute, with hidden apostolic fruitfulness, to the growth of the people of God.<sup>14</sup>

Our Constitutions express this same reality in a number of places, for example:

Like the Church of the Apostles our communion is founded, built up and made firm in the one Spirit. It is in the same Spirit that we receive the Word of God from the Father with one faith, contemplate him with one heart, and praise him with one voice. In him we are made one body, share in the one bread and finally hold all things in common . . . The nuns first build in their own monasteries the Church of God which they help to spread throughout the world by the offering of themselves. (LCM 3.I, II)

(c) St. Thomas also gives us useful *guidelines about changing law* which we can apply to our directory determinations regarding enclosure. He says there are two reasons warranting a change of a human law: **first**, when something else is seen to be less frequently deficient for the common good; **second**, when different circumstances arise, because one and the same thing is not always right for the common good. He adds the observation made by Aristotle that human laws derive very great force from custom and consequently should not be changed quickly but only when minimal harm is done in this respect.<sup>15</sup>

(d) *Dominican dispensation*. The law of dispensation, one of the pillars of Dominican government, is another aspect of our law that provides an openness to the breath of the Spirit. It is written into our Constitutions in these words:

From the beginning of the Order some power of dispensation has been expressly granted to superiors of both friars and nuns, not to relax regular observance, but rather so that the end of the Order might be better attained. (LCM 188) The regular superior and also the prioress or the one taking her place has the power to dispense the nuns regarding the regular observance in particular circumstances for a just reason. (LCM 189.I)

This is related to the three points already mentioned. In instances where the common good or the good of an individual may need an exception, *not to relax regular observance, but rather so that the good of the Order might be better attained*, a dispensation from the law of enclosure may be judged to be in order.

Discerning when a dispensation is warranted may not always be simple. Obviously, leaving the monastery to attend a Conference Assembly or to participate in the theological formation program sponsored by the Conference qualify as appropriate dispensations. Conviction and clarity about our monastic enclosure enables us to

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<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II *Vita Consecrata*, March 25, 1996, 4, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, I-II, Q. 97.

apply the law of dispensation as St. Dominic intended namely, that the end might be better attained.

2. *The formative value of enclosure in the context of the spirit of the Order.* Enclosure is meant to provide a stable locus for being converted to the Lord, for being transformed into that image of God in grace which each of us has been created to be. By providing this holy ground for prayer and for living in the spirit of the Beatitudes, the observance of enclosure can be said to be formative.

In recent years we have stressed the intellectual and theoretical aspect of formation and on-going formation; there is a serious need to do this. But it has an equally important partner, the old-fashioned method of apprenticeship.

Enclosure creates the sacred place which the dynamism of the Lord's gentle presence permeates and illuminates. Here we humbly welcome the Word that has been planted in our hearts (James 1:21). Within the silence of the monastery regular observance become our essential tool for cultivating that Word: common life, chapter, the celebration of the liturgy and private prayer, the vows, study, work and penitential practices. (LCM 35.II) All of these instruments at our disposal were reverently maintained and handed down to us by those who went before us. We learn from these great women of ages past, we learn from others of our own generation and we learn while using them ourselves. Every aspect of life in the monastery is made sacred because of the abiding presence of the Lord. The cell becomes an enclosure within the enclosure (LCM 50); the refectory assumes a liturgical air because *just as we share together in the Eucharistic Bread, we also partake of our bodily food as a sign of sisterly communion* (LCM 54.I). As the Opus Dei is carried out day by day, the whole community is formed and given the possibility of being transformed into a radiant center of charity.

3. Enclosure with a view to *the evangelization of the Word*. The Year of Evangelization which Pope John Paul II has announced in preparation for the third Christian millennium reminds us that we belong to an Order whose first members were described by Pope Honorius III as *being appointed entirely for the complete evangelization of the Word of God*.<sup>16</sup> Our current Constitutions say that from the beginning St. Dominic associated the nuns, free for God alone, with his "holy preaching" by their prayer and penance (LCM 1.I), and we are further described as being "at the heart of the 'Holy Preaching'" (LCM 35.I).

We likened enclosure to the setting of a ring which touches and supports all aspects of the contemplative life we commit ourselves to live. A look at the specific texts in the Constitutions which mention enclosure and withdrawal from the world makes it clear

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<sup>16</sup> Honorius III: 'Letter to all Prelates of the Church,' 4 February, 1221 (MOPH XXV, p.145), cf. *Fundamental Constitution of the Order*, I.



that our monastic enclosure is only comprehensible in the total context of our lives as Dominican women of the Word.

The texts themselves tell us that the purpose of enclosure and silence is that the word of God may dwell abundantly in the monastery (96.II) and that the nuns may allow the seed which is the word of God to grow in their hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit and in so receiving it become more closely conformed to Christ (99). From other texts we can also see the bearing of enclosure upon so much of our life, for example: hearing and keeping the word of God; seeking, pondering and calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ, listening to his words; liturgical prayer; proclaiming that in Christ alone is true happiness; so that we may have leisure to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the kingdom of God; it sustains a hidden life that opens our minds to the love of God who sent his Son so that the whole world might be saved through him, etc.

In one of his homilies St. John Chrysostom says of St. Paul, the great evangelizer during his imprisonment: "Though housed in a narrow space, St. Paul dwelt in heaven."<sup>17</sup> He continues by saying that he accepted suffering more readily than others reach out for rewards, in fact he regarded them as prizes. "To depart and be with Christ" was certainly a reward, while remaining in the flesh meant struggle. Yet such was his longing for Christ that he wanted to defer his reward and remain amid the fight. He was driven by zeal for the whole Body of Christ. I hope it is not too presumptuous to say that this seems to capture something of the ideal of the life of a Dominican Nun.

4. *Its prophetic and sign value:* As a charism, the contemplative life of withdrawal from the world 'in spirit and in fact' has a prophetic and sign value which many recent Church documents indicate, for example:

It is both legitimate and necessary that some of Christ's followers, those upon whom this particular grace has been conferred by the Holy Spirit, should give expression to this contemplative character of the Church by actually withdrawing into solitude to lead this particular type of life, in order that 'through constant prayer and ready penance they give themselves to God alone'(VS, I). Their life is nothing other than a journey to the heavenly Jerusalem and an anticipation of the eschatological Church immutable in its possession and contemplation of God (VS, V).

Our Constitutions give the specifically Dominican aspect of the prophetic and sign value and make a connection with evangelization when they say:

By our hidden life we proclaim prophetically that in Christ alone is true happiness to be found, here by grace and afterwards in glory. (LCM 1.V)

The nuns, while living together in harmony, follow Jesus as he withdraws into solitude to pray. In this way they are a sign of that blessed city Jerusalem which the brethren build up by their preaching. (cf LCM 35.I)

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<sup>17</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Homily 2 in praise of St. Paul: PG 50, 480-484.



The unanimity of our life, rooted in the love of God, should furnish a living example of that reconciliation of all things in Christ which our brethren proclaim in their preaching of the word. (LCM 2.II)

5. *The tradition of enclosure from St. Dominic until now:* From the beginning of the Order Saint Dominic chose enclosure for the nuns in the monasteries he established. Some existing monasteries came under his guidance at the request of the Pope, for the precise reason that there was a need for reform of the practice of monastic enclosure. We can question St. Dominic about how we might best express enclosure today. Perhaps the clearest reply he would give is to be found in the traditions that have been handed down to us over the centuries, in the convictions we have acquired from our own experience of Dominican monastic life, and in our Constitutions as they develop and change following the principles for government which Dominic himself set forth for the Order.

The Dominican charism, as it is expressed in our enclosure forms, comes out of the life and spirit of our founder. Blessed Jordan tells us that when Dominic lived as an Augustinian Canon:

He frequented the church day and night...He prayed without ceasing and making use of the leisure afforded for contemplation, he scarcely ever left the monastery grounds.<sup>18</sup>

St. Dominic is pictured in art as being alone in the desert at the foot of the cross. And in the Ninth Way of Prayer we find that:

... when he was on a journey he would say to his companions: "It is written 'I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.'" He would then part from his companions ... going on his own he would pray as he walked, and a fire was kindled in his meditation ... The brethren thought that in this kind of prayer the saint acquired the fullness of Sacred Scripture and the very heart of the understanding of God's words, and also a power and boldness to preach fervently, and a hidden intimacy with the Holy Spirit to know the hidden things of God.<sup>19</sup>

A passage from Cassian's *Conferences*, St. Dominic's steady reading, can be linked with this ninth way of prayer.<sup>20</sup> It reads:

Jesus retired into the mountain to pray, thus teaching us by example that if we too wish to approach God with a pure and spotless affection of heart, we should also retire from all the disturbance and confusion of crowds, so that ... 'God may be' to us 'all in all.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Blessed Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Simon Tugwell, OP, *Early Dominicans: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Leonard Hindsley, OP, *Conferences on the Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic*.

<sup>21</sup> *Conferences of Cassian*, "The Second Conference of Abbot Isaac", Chapter VI. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* XI (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1991), 403.

It is this spirit that St. Dominic instilled in the first nuns, *for they had no other master to instruct them about the Order*.<sup>22</sup> We are entrusted with handing on this heritage to another generation of Dominicans, a tradition of 790 years.

## **II. ENCLOSURE: LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE**

### **AN EDUCATED GUESS**

What does the future shape of Dominican monastic enclosure look like? I believe that we have enough information at our disposal to make an educated guess.

#### **1. Levels of Authority**

As is presently the case, future legislation will have six levels of authority. The difference from the present legislation will probably be in the degree of responsibility at each level. Going from the general to the particular:

(1) There will be a document or an instruction from the Congregation for Religious to replace *Venite Seorsum*, with general norms for all contemplative monasteries. Whether or not this will distinguish between men's and women's enclosure is uncertain; it has been discussed so often that it would seem that some attempt may be made to address the issue. However, a reading of *Vita Consecrata* leads one to believe that there may still be enclosure norms which are exclusively for women. Although 6 and 8 speak of both men and women living monastic life, 59 treats of 'cloistered nuns,' and reference is made to nuns' enclosure in this number.

(2) The instruction will continue to give authority to the bishop of the local church in the matter of enclosure.

(3) Any general instruction will make provision for the particular law of each Order and tradition. This will undoubtedly require some revision of our Constitutions to address what is specific to the Dominican charism in the matter of enclosure. For example some allowance for study or aspects of formation, already possible now, may be specified.

(4) The revised section of the Constitutions will leave room for individual communities and federations to provide further for their particular needs. More responsibility will be given to the monastery Chapter to make policies specific to the needs of that community in the matter of enclosure. In the community Chapter we find another key aspect of our government coming from the genius

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<sup>22</sup> Blessed Cecelia, *Miracula S. Dominici*, n.6. [LCM lists this as n.7, but both Francis Lehner, OP, *Saint Dominic: Early Biographical Documents* (Washington: Thomist Press, 1964), p.171, and Simon Tugwell, OP *Early Dominicans*, p. 391, refer to it as n. 6].

of St. Dominic himself: his confidence in the community as made up of individuals open to the guidance and working of the Holy Spirit, which led him to give the Chapter members a large share in shaping its own community life.

(5) It seems that the prioress of a monastery will be given more authority to make decisions for legitimate dispensation in the matter of enclosure.

(6) As has always been the case, each Sister, keeping the end of the Dominican contemplative life and the common good in mind, will be responsible for her own observance of enclosure and for permissions or dispensations she requests.

## **2. Yesterday, Today and . . .**

The next point we can make about the future of enclosure comes from that great teacher known as history. From the dawn of Christianity the monastic life of withdrawal from the world in silence and solitude has been honored as a way of living the Gospel. The value and significance of the enclosure which supports this will be more strongly affirmed by whatever document the Church will put forth. The norms will change somewhat but it will be possible to maintain the basic elements in the descriptive introduction to the section on enclosure in our present Constitutions:

By withdrawal from the world, in fact and in spirit, the nuns, like prudent virgins waiting for their Lord, are freed from worldly affairs so that they may have leisure to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the kingdom of God. This hidden life should open their minds to the love of God who sent his Son so that the whole world might be saved through him. (LCM 36)

## **CONCLUSION**

We have looked briefly at the value and significance of enclosure in the light of God and the Church and have seen how this monastic observance, with a tradition reaching back to the beginnings of Christianity, confronts contemporary culture. We have examined it in the context of our Dominican charism, and now we ask ourselves what the future of enclosure looks like and how this will affect our lives. We can be certain of this: in the wake of the Synod, as the Church reevaluates the contemplative life, we can expect to be challenged once again as *Word-bearers, to be a radiant center of charity at the heart of the 'holy preaching,' to build in our own monasteries the Church of God which we can help to spread throughout the world by the offering of ourselves.* (LCM 14, 35, 3.II)

We pray that Mary, model of all contemplatives, within whom the Incarnate Word was enclosed at the beginning of his life, who stood by the Lord fixed to the cross, who saw him placed within the tomb at the end, and who prayed with the Twelve in the Upper Room, will guide us in living the true meaning of our lives as Dominicans until each of us is enfolded within her mantle forever. May Christ, who was fastened to the cross for all, be fast-knit to our hearts! (LCM 74.IV)

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